

THE GOLD FROG

(Riddle)



Written by:

William N. Veach

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(Riddle)



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T H E G O L D F R O G

(R i d d l e)



By:

WILLIAM N. VEACH

(WRITTEN : 1991)

THE GOLD FROG (RIDDLE)

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INTRODUCTION

Rarely, does one have this unique opportunity to participate in an adventure that most observers would assume to be merely fictional. Indeed, The GOLD FROG Riddle is the key to an age-old secret, that has been locked away in time, and yet preserved here for ever.

Now, you can relax and enjoy the hunt.

The riddle is quite complex and requires extreme concentration and persistence. Good old constructive or sound deductive reasoning and your imagination are all that you'll need, except of course, the "Map" and the GOLD FROG. The first can be found safely hidden, "in good keeping," and for the latter, you'll have to catch him - - - "while he is sleeping." Ribbot!!

GOOD LUCK!!

Author's Note: The image of this solution just may happen to appear only in a dream or an illusion.



THE GOLD FROG

(Riddle)

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THIS NOVEL IS PUBLISHED
BY
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THE GOLD FROG

Chapter

ONE

That First Day

The one thing that you can be sure of is that our lives are just one grand treasure hunt. Once we learn the signs of sure opportunity, the clues to enrichment clearly seem to mark the way.

First and foremost, I've always been one of those people who kept one eye on the ground, alert for green folding money. And, it was on a hot afternoon in July that I found myself standing on the Metrorail platform and 90 feet beneath the raging streets of Washington's business district, waiting, for the "Orange line" into Virginia. I'd been watching a well dressed woman with her two companions, having an intense discussion about the tardiness of the train. Her off hand motions were rhythmical, but emphatically beating, against the side of her right leg. And her grossly large diamond rings created light arcs in the still, cool air.

In general, she was creating a small roaring mute commotion. Then suddenly, one of her largest diamonds "popped" right out of its setting. She didn't notice. No one (else) noticed. Though, all of the world could have been watching, - - - - the floor lights are now flashing. The train is coming. The diamond hits the hard floor with a "deafening silence," bouncing across the platform, between so many feet, and resting itself against - - a concrete barrier, backing up the waiting area. When I approach the stone, I see a small object that darts over and plucks up the orphaned diamond.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter one

The travelers board the train. I can not take my eyes off of the object. I hear the train doors slide shut. My eyes seem to be playing tricks. The train lurches and now rolls quietly out of the station. The light seems to be a little better, now. I am alone on the platform. I can't believe my eyes. This "object" seems to be a small - - GOLD FROG, about the size of a large hen's egg. It moves. It's gone!

Like an old world monument to modern travel, it's now quiet and completely empty. Quickly, I find an 8- inch long rectangular hole at the base of the concrete barrier wall and looking over and down to the floor of the channel running behind and below the platform, I'm able to see the fast hopping frog. It's gone, again! I jump over the barrier down into the channel. There, light is good. There's the frog! It's now under the platform. There's only a crawl space. I'll follow. Rough going for someone my size.

The light is still good, but I'm not gaining any, though. The GOLD FROG appears again, then goes into a concrete conduit pipe or something, with a large gauge grate covering the oval opening. Need to get closer. Gotta get closer.

I see the frog. There he is! He is moving away. He jumps right through the grate, with the big diamond securely in his keep. Can still see the little devil. Seems to know that I am following him. He's waiting.

He's waiting? For me? Why? Hmmmmn, a GOLD FROG could be frozen - - - no, not frozen. Uhhh, poison, like in Panama. Damn, the air must be getting thin in here. I can't seem to think what I mean. Alright, so here I go. Almost there.

Well, a building grate it's not. And, there goes another train, overhead. Looks like a conduit exit or entrance, but there seems to be giant granite boulders blocking the passageway.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter one

Yet, it's so dry and loose. I feel a draft. The source is beyond the granite boulders.

Looking through the crevices, at the bottom, I'll try digging a larger access hole. Then, I think I can see a - - - -. Damn! Right in my face! He touched my nose. I didn't even see him, at all, until he was right there. "Right in my face." I'm O.K. I'm going to be alright, I think. Not poison.

Now, where is the little devil? Just what was he doing, anyway? Damn, it is "hot" in here.

Maybe he wanted to make sure that I would try and get on through - - - to follow him. Well, I sure as Hell will. Make no mistake about it.

After about an hour, of digging out and squeezing my way through right angle niches, I finally broke out - - - into a small room-like chamber. It decreases in height to the rear. Can't see too well. The whole floor seems to be missing. Glad I'm carrying my half- sized flashlight. Eyes are adjusting to the darkness. Now, I see a narrow ledge running along the left side. There goes that GOLD FROG, leading the way, to a small exit point in the rear. I'll continue to follow him. There is a small landing at the rear wall and - - - a shallow trough, like at a bank teller's window slot. It's a snug fit. Imagine how sliding under the bottom of a wall feels. I'm through! There is the frog. He is leading the way down a winding tunnel. The winding seems to be all to the left, spiraling downward like a long, long ramp. This tunnel's getting larger. Down. Down. There's some light.

I am getting tired, but I will keep moving on. I can't see very far ahead. And, I can't see that frog. The light ahead is better. Now, I don't even need the flash. I'll save it.

I seem to be coming to something "major."

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter one

It looks like - - - - oh! Suddenly, I'm standing at the entrance of a cathedral size chamber.

The light seems to be filtering down, slowly from holes in the ceiling. No color. Just strong filtered shafts from above. The air is better, too - - - - no distinct odor but light and refreshing. How can it be so clean and fresh, way down here? I should be over a hundred and fifty feet below street level. Maybe, 200 feet down.

If I could only find the right words. It's a bit as if I was traveling in two different dimensions, but in two parallel directions, at the same time. Such a departure as this is a little unreal, yet just for the security of reality, I can always - - - - go back.

The GOLD FROG is sitting beside a raised pool, of water. As I get closer, I see the frog move closer to the edge. The frog jumps into the water, his golden form glides along the surface, silently and swims over to a ledge extending from my right. He's on the ledge and now his eyes become dilated, huge. He spits out the large diamond, right onto the ledge, as though he is showing it off. He grabs it up again, as I come a bit closer, and he spits it way out into the middle of the pool. It's gone!

What did he do that for? I wonder, how deep this water is? Are there many more GOLD FROGS? He jumps back into the water, goes under. I am now at the edge of the pool. The light is faint. It must be 15 to 20 feet across. Can't focus my eyes to see down into the water. And, I can't see the diamond that he spit out into the middle, because the lateral vision in here is not very good, except directly in one of the shafts of light, and there isn't any filtering directly into the pool. Can't see the bottom clearly. It must be 20 or 25 feet deep. Can't tell, for sure.

Damn! The water in this pool is ice cold.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter one

No, it feels even colder than ice! I'm alone. I don't see the frog. Is he watching? Are there more diamonds on the bottom? Of course, there are. He, or his kind, has been collecting this treasure for a long time. Will he share it?

Like an eclipse in slow motion, the first after a blue moon, the overhead light has been growing dimmer, steadily. The sun must be setting, up above, upon the street level. The tall buildings in the business part of town would cause it to appear to do so, sooner than it would in an open field area. It's soon going to be completely dark in here, for at least 16 hours, before the sun is even high enough, tomorrow, to light up the shafts again. That is, if it is not cloudy tomorrow.

I'll have to get back to the surface before it is totally dark in here. I can always come back. Since, I know where to come, now. Not, that it will be easy. Just getting through those boulders, is rough to think about. And, that "pit." That must have been at least 25 feet deep. I couldn't see the bottom clearly. But my eyes were still adjusting, and I was in a hurry, as I didn't want to loose sight of the frog.

But, I can do it! It is going to be worth it. I must get out of here, quickly now. I'd like to take a little something with me, as proof that this discovery really did happen. That, it is not just a dream.

Now, that's odd. I mean, I must have been really glued in on that GOLD FROG, over here at the pool with the diamond, when I first came into this Great Chamber and its mysterious light shafts. I remember now, that my eyes took time to adjust to the lighting. But now, just for the first time, as I take a good look at this room, I had not even noticed before - - - that there was more than just the one entranceway.

In fact, there are 8 tunnels or exits leading out of this chamber. But, which one did I come in by?

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter one

"Footprints," of course! Since, I'm the only one person to have ever come in here, recently that is, my footprints would indicate which tunnel I'd entered by. But now, the light has gotten dim. I can't make out a single one of my prints. It is getting dark, fast. I will be stuck in here all night - - - alone.

Now, I really wonder why there doesn't seem to be any sign of rats down here? What keeps them out? The GOLD FROG? Are there more of him? "How long" do they live, 8 to 12 years? Then, why would he be collecting and guarding these jewels, when he would not have good reason to want to keep them for any humanly associated values? Unless, he was trained to collect them. It's possible that he came from a circus act, or something. Or, maybe he collects them because they sparkle in the light. It does, truly, seem to be a mystery.

The light is almost completely gone. There isn't more than a glow. Street lights! Maybe. Well, it is a night light for me. I am thirsty. It's going to be a long night. I wonder if this water in the pool "is" alright to drink? It is the only water around. It'll have to do. It looks okay. I'll try some in my hand, first. It tastes okay, too. Really cold, though! It is too cold. That's enough. Can't drink any more.

Now that it's too dark to leave, I'll just get as comfortable as I can over here by the pool. I'll want to look for the footprints again, in the morning, when the good light comes back. In a way, it is not so bad not having to leave the treasure here, if there is any more. I'll have to try and think of some other method of getting down to the bottom of the pool.

I do seem to have the whole place to myself. And there's nobody to miss me or worry about me as missing or in trouble. Which, I am not. I might as well "dig in." I'll just shift this dry sand around and so that I can fit the contour of my - - - wait just a minute my good man. What's this? Found something small, eh?

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter one

Hmmm? It's round, not so big. Huh? It's like a quarter! No. Not a quarter. Can't see it very well. But it doesn't have a reeded edge, like a quarter. It is the same size. But, who would have dropped coinage of any kind here, anyway? Not me.

It is rather smooth around the edge. I've got to see this better with my flashlight. Here it is again. Let's take a look. It is brownish, not silver. Hmmm? The front has a head of someone on it. It has "funny" lettering around the rim.

It says: "GEORGIVS." Uh, "III REX." It is a bit worn on the back. Can make out the date: "17 - - - - 73!" More letters around the rim: "NIA" and "VIRGI." Can't make much out of that in the dark. Must be some foreign coin. British?

Well, I'll look at it again, tomorrow. Wait just a minute - - - - 1773 is colonial times - - - - that's American, colonial money, "NIA - VIRGI?" I've got it! I see it. Yes. Virginia! Virginia! But, what's the value? And how much is it going to be worth? That is really old, over 200 years old! I'll have to look all around in the sand, some more tomorrow when I wake up, and when the light comes back.

How did this coin get down - - - - of course, how else? The GOLD FROG. Maybe he had a mouth full, then he just dropped one, here. Who knows? But, this coin is mine.

I would go poking around in here tonight, but I'd just succeed in killing the batteries in my flash real quick. I've got to make them last. And that can best be accomplished by waiting until tomorrow when all the light I'll need will be back, from above.

Until I know for sure that I can get out of here, I'm going to treat these batteries more like gold. It is now time to get to sleep. Sweet dreams.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter one

What was that? I thought I heard something. No, maybe not. I'm just a little jumpy, way down here, in the dark. Afterall, if I am alone, there isn't anyone to even bother me. Can't sleep, too much excitement.

Being a writer, I love this kind of adventure.

I've been thinking about my agent. And, it might be true that a writer needs an agent for a few special services, but the truth be known, a writer has most of the skills to edit, print, publish and even bind every book he can write. He is his own art form.

Now, that's not to say that the "form" or "style" I use will suit any editor. Do I care?

It's just that I don't want to write whatever the "market" seems to want, or that some editor feels safe publishing for "his" readers. How does he know what I want to read? Hell, even I don't always know. I like something different, most of the time. It's not going to be the same thing, over and over. No, surprise me! That's what I want, a surprise.

Well, I'm beginning to feel a little sleepy, now. Time to put this press to bed. Sweet dreams, again.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter

TWO

Sweet Dreams

What was that? Sounded kind of like a steel door slamming shut. I seem to be - - - - on an arched span or bridge, going - - - - over to an island. There's a sign. It says: "Roosevelt Island." I have been here before - - - - looking for clues - - - - in a treasure hunt. I was very close, then. As I remember, it was that first in a series of clues, a primary link in any extensive chain. Each link "builds" upon the previous one. An exception is the "false clue." It is an unavoidable hazard, like the loose end link, in the very middle of a chain, that leads nowhere. Each clue must clearly seem to mark the way.

I can't sleep. Feel hot! Like I've got a fever. I'll just cool off, with some cold pool water, here on my face, and on my head. Ohhh, that feels good. Now, I'll get to sleep. Must sleep. It will help pass the night, 'til morning.

Where am I? Everything is all different - - - - all shades of gray. This place looks like the surface of the Moon probably does. Everything is wet, just as though it had just rained. The ground is all rock, or slick, smooth slate gray rock. And, there are larger, boulder size and very small slick, smooth, gray rocks, but no dirt or trees. It is foggy, too. The light is dim, but it glistens on the smooth surfaces. I hear a heavy voice. It's speaking to me. And it seems to be trying to provoke me. It is annoying.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter two

It's saying: "Come on. Hurry up. You're already late. Everybody is waiting for you. Everyone else is already there. You're the only one who's not in their proper place. You are late!"

Ease off. I don't really want to go anywhere, if it's not my idea. And, where is it I'm supposed to be going, anyway?

"Why, to your own funeral, of course! Don't you even recognize where you are? You're late! Come on. Come on."

This is absurd. I don't even want to go - - - not to my own funeral. Except - - - I wouldn't mind being there. I mean just to see if anyone else really came. I'd be curious to see who came. A lot of folks that I'd know?

Ohhhh, I must have dozed off. I'm hot. Too hot! I need some cold water, more cold water. Ahhh, that's great! Just a little drink. Cold. Good. Uhhmm, I'm sleepy, again.

I'm back, back at the Great Chamber, by the pool. The light is very faint. I can see the GOLD FROG. He is much bigger than usual, 9 or 10 inches tall. He is speaking to me. He's saying something about a riddle.

"If you want to solve the GOLD FROG riddle - - -

Find the Map in blue out of sight,
It will lead you to the light,
Where he sleeps with all his wealth,
Must catch him with great stealth,
Raise the flag over his nest,
Behold the GOLD of his crest."

Ribbot! Ohhh, dreaming, again. It's so vivid, I remember everything, now. Hey, where am I? Ohhh, no. I remember this, too. I'm still in the Great Chamber.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter two

I feel chilled, uhh, cold. My chest is all wet, soaking wet! I must've had a fever last night, and I had all those wild dreams. I especially remember the last one. Weird! Is the riddle in my fate, now? Is it my destiny to solve it? A talking GOLD FROG! I'm not drinking any more of that - - - . It must have been the pool water that I drank, along with all the bizarre events of yesterday, that brought out all the strange notions I dreamed of. No wonder!

Was the GOLD FROG an intervention of Fate? Am I to be so different? Or, have I always been this way? Is this a special course with Fate, just biding time? So, maybe this is a test. I'm game! Besides, I am a bit curious, anyway, about all these tunnels. Wonder if the light will be brighter today?

One thing for sure, I won't be drinking any more of that water. Unless - - - nah. I probably would never have the very same or a continuation of - - - the same dream. Hmmm. But, I do want to write these few lines down, now, all of the GOLD FROG Riddle that I can remember.

The light isn't very good, in here. It's almost hazy looking. My watch says it's 11:30 a.m., but the overhead light is faint. Some heavy cloud cover must be blocking out the direct sunlight, from the streets above. Weather! Just what I need.

Here's a pen. I can write on these library note cards. Good thing that I kept them. Now, let's see. Uh, he said: "Find the Map in the blue out of sight." And, "It will lead you to the light, - - - Where he sleeps with all his wealth." I "Must catch him with great stealth." And, "Raise the flag over his nest," "Behold the GOLD of his crest."

How could I have dreamed all these things that I would not normally have even thought of? This fever? It must have caused those illusions. I do believe.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter two

I don't even begin to understand any of this, or what is behind it. What does it mean? And, could my mind have made up that GOLD FROG Riddle? Maybe, it's my subconscious. My mind has been working on whether or not any other jewels might have been hidden in the area by that GOLD FROG. That does interest me. Yes, it does. The two mind-sets do correlate.

Wait a minute, I forgot. I've got to get out of here. I'm hungry. The "footprints." There's plenty of light to see them. Let's see now. Which of these tunnels is the one that I came in by? It was so damn awesome with the surprise of finding the light shafts in this huge chamber, that I'd never even noticed how the position of the light could favor any one side of it or the other, depending on where you are standing. And, the sandy floor is so dry, that there aren't any footprints, anywhere. There isn't even one where I'm standing now, not a single one.

As I walk slowly around the chamber's perimeter, by each of the eight entranceways, not a trace of any definite footprints are evident, just a sandy quilted pattern of irregular depressions, everywhere. There is no certain way to know which one I came in by, off hand. And, there is also no trace of the "GOLD FROG" that led me in here. I wonder where he went after it got dark in here last night? Why would he feel safe?

Maybe, if the GOLD FROG were here, right now, he could show me which one goes out. Then again, any of them could link all the others, and all of them could go back out, eventually.

All these entrances make it difficult to get any sort of correlation between them and this frog. And, he's been here for quite some time. I think that the right one should lead back, upward. So, what I'll do is just go far enough into each tunnel, so as to tell if it goes back upward, in a spiraling direction, off to the right. That's easy and shouldn't take long.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter two

I'll start over here at the far left side of the pool. But wait, I want to check something, first. I want to see if I can see the bottom of the pool, over where the frog spit that big diamond. And, if I can, - - - nothing! Still, not enough light. I'll have to come back on a very sunny, clear day.

It could take more than an hour to check out all of these tunnels even briefly. Well, I might as well get started. But, I really don't think that this one is the one. In looking all around the chamber, I can not remember having ever had this exact or particular view of the pool before. And, the lighting is rather different, all together. I seem to detect a slightly faint glow over the entrance, on the opposite side of the chamber. It's over the entrance immediately from the right of the pool. But, that's not the one where I came in, definitely not. That is where I came over to, when I first saw the GOLD FROG, perched up on the front edge of the pool. Maybe, there is a better way out, a lot easier I hope.

With all these entrances, the Great Chamber must be the main "hall." And, all these entrances must be the way of screening intruders, a complex of security channels, a system for weeding out uninvited visitors or intruders. Something might have broken down in my case or the GOLD FROG led me in the only safe way in. Question is twofold: why and is there a safe way out, - - - anymore?

Hmmm, I guess I'm not considered an undesirable. Wish I'd thought to bring an apple with me. Oh Lord, I'm hungry. Must concentrate on getting out of here, for now. If I can. Then, I will plan on coming back here later, to further investigate all these tunnels.

If I were to number these 8 entrances, and start from the one on the left of the pool, as I stand with my back to it, then this would be entrance # 8. And, it's the smallest entrance of them all.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter two

Now, I want to check this one out. The dirt and rock arch seems O.K., nothing unusual. The threshold is a series of flat stones. As I clean off the sand, there's nothing, still nothing, - - - wait. Here's something. It's an arrow in a circle! It's pointing into this tunnel # 8. I'd say this is it. And, I am out of here!

There was a little bit of light in that tunnel I came down here by, from the Metrorail level. It was coming from the Great Chamber. Although, it was ever so slight. This tunnel # 8 is dark, pitch dark.

Now, the riddle said to find the Map in blue out of sight. And it will lead you to the "light," where he sleeps with all his wealth - - - . Hmmmm? O.K., I'm looking in the blue. The "blue" what? I need to mark this tunnel as number 8, and the primary tunnel from the Great Chamber. That's what the arrow in the circle says, pointing this way out.

I've only gone a short distance in, and already, I can tell this isn't going back up to the Metrorail. I have to wonder which direction I'm really going in. Need a compass - - - next time! I am not lost, but coming in and down that winding ramp-like tunnel, I'd lost track of the general direction in which it ended up going, into the Great Chamber. I would guess that I was going North, when I first saw the pool. Now, I would seem to be going, generally, to the West.

Must mark this tunnel, as I go, so I can find my way back, in case this exit is closed off by a modern improvement, like a retaining wall or highway ramp.

The busy streets above are a long ways up. Each time I come upon an intersecting or a sharply turning tunnel, it should be given a new number or letter to show that a change from normal direction has occurred and to be able to tell them apart. Eventually, I may find dozens of tunnels down here, before I finish.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter two

Where could the Map be? Maybe, there will be an obvious clue near the "blue." But, where? This dark tunnel is now going upgrade, steadily. I must now be getting closer to the surface. I've come about a 1/4 of a mile and the tunnel seems to be coming to a dead end. No, wait - - - it is turning sharply, at a 45 degree angle left, southward. The new direction must be about due southwest. All this while, I'm steadily progressing upward through this dark tunnel, with its rough dirt floor, a question lurks in my mind. Is it that I'm now actually starting at the very beginning, the original starting point, or have I begun at a new point in the middle? Will any clues make sense to me now? Time will tell.

The GOLD FROG didn't say whether or not to leave the Great Chamber, in order to find the Map. But, my immediate need is to find my way out, to the surface. I am not necessarily going to achieve either of these goals merely by taking this tunnel. I can't help but think of the Riddle. And, wonder - - - I must have come another 1/4 to 3/8ths of a mile, and now I think I can hear rushing water. Since the Great Chamber, I must have come up a 100 to 125 feet, above that floor level. I'm going toward the Potomac River, moving on forward, slowly. This couldn't be the Potomac? I'm getting closer to it. Here it is. Finally!

It is merely a shallow, narrow stream rushing to my left. It is in its own low ceiling tunnel. As it crosses perpendicular to this tunnel, it isn't a very wide one, as streams go, only 9 or 10 feet. It's not very deep, only - - - about 7 or 8 inches. It does have swift moving water, with many smallish rocks and seems refreshingly cool. I wonder, if it is safe for me to drink? I'll wait. Maybe, later. Right now, I can hear something - - - like a roar, far away, off and down to my left, where the stream is going. I'll turn off my flashlight, saving the poor batteries and giving my senses the best possible chance to evaluate where and what this sound could be.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter two

Now, I'll let my eyes adjust to the darkness, as time allows. O.K. Now, what do I hear? Wait just a minute. I see something on up ahead in this original tunnel. It's - - - a very faint hint of light. It "is" light! Definitely, light.

I've got to go wherever there's a sign of light. In fact, I must be getting right close to the Potomac River, if my sense of direction was correct, earlier. Furthermore, even though I was around 200 feet below the surface at the Metrorail station, I should really be near the surface, 'cause the actual contour of the surface "downgrades" to the Potomac. That downgrade, in combination with this gradual 125-foot increase in elevation I've experienced, should put me right about the surface.

But, first I want to briefly check out this roar of a sound that I hear, just to see if it's worth any further investigation when I get back this way, soon. There is a very narrow path going right alongside and downstream, on this side. But, there's no path to be seen on either side when I look upstream. Also, that tunnel seems to get smaller, upstream. Approximately 25 feet up there, the roof of the tunnel descends all the way down to only three feet above the water. I'd be at a loss to see any reason to try to go upstream.

Moving downstream, my flashlight's still working good. If the batteries give out, not to mention this bulb, I'd be in real trouble, but I want to see where the roar is coming from and whatever it is all about. I've come close to a 150 feet. The narrow path comes to a wall and ends. Here's another tunnel, small and narrow. Careful, fella. It's quite steep, more like a ramp, and it's curving downward and around - - - and out into a room, about 25 to 30 feet across, and, there is the source of the roar. It's a 20-foot high waterfall, falling from above - - - and into a pool at my feet, about 15 feet across. I can't tell, yet, where all that much water is exiting.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter two

It must be the only way out, yet, I don't see it right now. So, there's something more here than that which is immediately apparent. But, what? I'll have to come back and check this room out much better, for the exact exit. Right now, I have got to get back up to the other tunnel.

That's unique. This winding, steep ramp ends up right down here at the bottom of the waterfall.

Back up at the top of that steep ramp, I find my way upstream. Getting back to the main tunnel again, I start looking for the faint light, but to no avail. So, I'll turn off the flashlight. Could it have been a freak occurrence? I should've checked on it sooner and I'd know now. I shouldn't have investigated that roaring sound, first. I knew it must be a waterfall.

I guess there is no guarantee that one will ever successfully solve the GOLD FROG Riddle, even if I go through all the tunnels down here. Right now, I must continue up this tunnel in the direction that I saw a faint glow of light, earlier.

Crossing the stream, I find that the tunnel gets somewhat smaller. The earth begins to smell damp. I could be smelling the effects of surface drainage. I must be getting close. Suddenly, the tunnel comes to an end in a room, just slightly larger than this main tunnel, itself. Here's another room off to my right. It's about 10 feet by 12 feet, like a "storage room," but there's no exit.

Back to the end of the tunnel. I saw light here earlier. I'll just wait a while until it comes back, again. Hope it won't be very long, though.

About 40 minutes later, the light comes back on. It's much stronger and it's coming through a sizeable crack in the wall at the end of the tunnel. The wall is straight up, and it is smooth. It's not rock!

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter two

No, - - - it's concrete. The crevice is about 11 inches inside, and about a 45 degree angle through this 3-foot thick wall. Through the crevice, I see a light in the ceiling of a room. It's man-made, not a source of sunlight. There's a small room and a door.

Someone just left the room, leaving the light on for me. It seems to be an equipment room. I better hurry before someone comes back.

Voices! Human voices. They're just outside the room. One of them seems to be addressing the others, about some kind of historical point - - - she must be a tour guide. This must be a museum or a basement part of one of the monuments. Uh, she just mentioned - - - the Lincoln Memorial. So, that's where I am. I'd better get through this crevice and on out before I'm seen here in this room. There! I'm finally out.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter

T H R E E

The Black Hole

I'll just slide out of here and join up with the tour and blend in until it finishes. Finally, I will be outside. But, I'll be back. This could be a much easier access point, in the future. It is not likely that anyone would find that crevice, for they haven't already, obviously. Or, they would've already filled up the crevice. That little room off to the side, at the end of the tunnel, will make a good supply depot, when I go back. I could make several trips in and go back there with supplies and equipment. But, I would not want to try to take too much at any one time, and become conspicuous. I'll need a small backpack.

Once I'm back on the street, all I have to do is find my way to Virginia. I'll get a ride at 23rd and Constitution Avenue, N.W., on a bus. When I get back home, I want to make a complete list of all the stuff that I'll need to take with me back into the tunnels, a few days from now.

Got something to eat at the fast food. They all looked at me like I was from another planet. I guess I do look a little rumpled and dirty. That, I intend to remedy once I get home, with a shower and a shave. It's early evening. So, I'm just going along to bed. And, - - - I'm going to sleep for days.

Uhhmm, sunlight. I'm awake again. What time is it? What day? Thursday. Good. I feel much better.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter three

I've got a lot to do before I go back on Monday. While I'm making my list of things to take along with me, I just remembered the little copper coin I found, the one about the size of a quarter, with the bust on it and three l's.

I put it safely in my front pocket, so as not to lose it. It might be "very rare." Where is it, now? Ah, here it is. Now, I can finally look at this coin in a better light. It is dark brown and worn some. The 1773 date is very old. Hmmm! Smells like copper. It is an old copper coin. I wonder just how it came to be where I found it? If no person was the likely one to have dropped it there, I'd say - - -. Of course, the GOLD FROG! He probably left it there. But, I wouldn't think that he would be that careless, though.

Maybe, it was left there on purpose. But, when? And, why just one? Or, were there, maybe, more and I just didn't look for them. I'll have to check when I go back. In the mean time, I want to find out what I can about this old copper coin. What denomination is it, or was it, then? It says "Virginia" on it. But, who made it, where, when, and how? All are very good questions, I think. Is it real, I mean, legal? And, more importantly, what's it worth? Is it rare? I'll try to find out, today.

Had a good breakfast. How good it feels to once again be shaved and wearing clean clothes. I'll call a coin shop or two and see if I can find out anything about this coin. Afterall, this is Virginia and it's from Virginia. They'll know.

Well, they didn't know anything at all, and they weren't much help. They did suggest that I call some other dealers. Okay, I'll call several other dealers from the Virginia, D.C., and Maryland area. After 40 minutes on the phone with many dealers, of all kinds, all made the same recommendation: read, read, read.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter three

However, none of them had any coins exactly like this one, nor were they very interested in it, except - - - - "Where did I get it?" Every last one of them asked where I got it. So, they "were" interested, on their own terms, only. They wanted information okay, but they weren't about to give out any. Well, what a selfish attitude. Afterall, sharing good information between mutually interested parties assists in better communication and generating an on going resource for future inquiries, as well as increase one's knowledge and wider appreciation of once narrowly defined lines of expertise.

I am going to have to gain someone's sympathetic ear or confidence. If I can only find someone who at least knows something pertinent or accurate. I might fare much better if I were to find an old experienced collector or author, rather than a dealer.

After making 45 phone calls, many long distance, I finally found someone who specializes in these rare old copper coins.

The man's name is Seth Barnett. And, he's got a coin shop in old Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. He has been collecting the 1773 Virginia coppers for all of 35 years. That is a long way to go, normally, but I'm in luck. His partner down there told me he is up here in Silver Spring, Maryland, for a big coin show, and he gave me his hotel name and phone number, also.

Hello, Mr. Barnett? My name's Steve DeVille and I'd like very much to talk to you as soon as possible about an old 1773 Virginia copper coin that I found a day ago, but I don't know much about it. I just came by it and don't have much time before I have to leave the area. Where'd I get it? Well, that is something each of 30 other coin dealers wanted to know earlier, but not one of 'em got an answer. Why do you ask? I need to know for myself. Oh. Well, - - - - the real truth is, I found it, oh, about 200 feet underground.

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Buried? No sir, not at all. I probably should not tell you, since I really don't know you, but then again, you're the first person that has even bothered to speak more than five words about it. So I'll tell you. But, first let me ask you a few harmless, basic questions. Okay?

Good Seth!

Do you know the background behind this old coin? You do? O.K. Colonial Virginia - - - yes. It was minted in England, really? A Halfpenny? Doesn't say so. How does one know? Sorry! I'm sure you do. If I tell you where I found it, will you tell me more of the background details? Maybe? Depends? Hmmm, O.K. I'll take a chance. I found this coin in a deep cave in this general vicinity.

You'll see me? Great! Where and when? At your hotel. Meet in the lobby. Fine. Seven p.m. - - - I'll be there. Bring the coin? Of course.

Seven o'clock. At last. Thought it would never come. Now, where - - - ?

"Hello, Steve? I'm Seth."

"Yes. I'm Steve. Nice to meet you."

"Steve, I suggest we have our meeting down here, as my wife is having some of our old friends over for a gettogether, and we would never be able to talk one word, in private. And, I do think we'll need to have our little talk, privately. Let's sit way over there in the corner where it's quiet."

"O.K., Seth."

"This will be fine. So, you're interested in my knowledge of the 1773 Colonial Virginia Halfpenny? I remember you saying the other dealers knew nothing."

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter three

"Yes. They seemed oblivious to the coin, though it is apparently quite rare and, indeed, actually did originate in this very region. Now, you'd think they would know about any rare coins from this area. It's really unbelievable!"

"Curious, but true, Steve. May I see the little copper you found recently?"

"Yes, here it is. I'm keeping it safe in a soft cloth pouch that I used to keep my class ring in."

"That's good. But, don't carry it around in the pocket of your pants, as it may receive unintentional abuse and wear through abrasion. Also try to keep it out of direct contact with the air or light. Being a basic copper product, those elements could change its physical appearance, for the worst."

"Very good, Seth. Thanks for your good advice."

"Not at all. I've seen some of these same coins that even turned black, from exposure. Now, this old coin "is" a Virginia Halfpenny. It is in pretty good shape, but - - - someone has added, uh, stamped, or etched the letter "M" on the reverse, or back side."

"I hadn't noticed that. But, most of the time I could have been looking at it, I was in the dark."

"Well, Steve, not having seen one before, you're probably not familiar enough to have noticed this and wouldn't realize it is different. The letter is just here, located amid the fleur-de-lis, in the upper and right quadrant upon Colonial Virginia's coat of arms. Even I haven't so much as seen one, firsthand before, not this type. Few counterstamped Colonial Virginia Halfpennies ever find their way into the market, much as they are extremely rare, indeed. But, if any type of letter is stamped on the coin, it's usually on the obverse, or front side. Moreover, it's much bolder."

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"This etching seems brief like a little footnote rather than a major statement. It seems more private or perhaps only there for a most discerning inquirer. But, by itself, it is rather meaningless, Seth."

"And, being totally new at this, I do not have a lot more to offer from my standpoint. How many coins like this were minted?"

"I will get to that in a moment, but you say you found this coin, 200 feet down in a cave?"

"Yes, Seth. I was exploring a network or system of tunnels, cut through the clay and rock of a nearby area. Much of Virginia, of course, is covered with a great many man-made and natural caves."

"Exactly, Steve. I'm intrigued by your interest in tunnels and caves. But, did you carefully look in that same area, all around very carefully for more of these copper coins, where you found this one?"

"No, the moment was overtaken by darkness. And, I was lucky to find even this one. I sat on it while I was getting comfortable to spend the night. So you see, that is how I found it."

"You mean, you weren't even looking for coins?"

"No, I just fell into that cave, mostly by sheer accident. And, I felt the coin under me in the sandy floor. So, I was actually somewhat lost when I found this one, as luck would have it. And, I was entirely distracted by the thought of spending the whole night in the dark cave and with my impending need for being able to find a way out the next morning, at the first light."

"First light, Steve? But, you said you were 200 feet down, in a cave? How could you have experienced sunlight all the way down there?"

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"Yes, it was a unique Great Chamber, with bright light shafts coming from the higher ceiling overhead. Possibly, they were core sampling holes of some kind. I was somewhat lost, because when I turned around and looked for the way that I had come in, I suddenly saw that there were 8 tunnel entrances, then. And it was getting dark very fast. The sun must have been going over the horizon. And, I couldn't find my footprints in the sandy floor. The next morning, when there was adequate light, there weren't any either."

"Exactly! The sandy floor was too dry. It just sounds fantastic."

"Yes. I want to continue exploring the cave at a future date, but first I want to know more about this unusual Colonial Virginia copper coin. Halfpenny!"

"Well Steve, I can certainly help you out there. In fact, I'm probably the only one with my particular insights. But, what I would like to know is how this coin got to where it was, 200 feet down."

"That is going to be a real mystery, Seth, for a very long time, I suspect."

"Hmmm, too bad, Steve. You could be on the very brink of a major discovery, long awaited by Virginia copper Halfpenny collectors. I'm going to tell you a tale about this little copper coin. First of all, it is a true Colonial Virginia Halfpence. It was minted in England, in 1773 at the London Tower Mint, legally authorized by a King George III Warrant. Whereby, an agreed upon 5 tons gross, or 672,000 copper Halfpenny coins were produced and shipped to Virginia, in Feb., 1774, but not distributed - - - among the colonists until 1775, just a few months before the historic war with England broke out. In spite of the anguish with the British, these Virginia copper Halfpennies were a much needed local coinage, readily accepted, and were the very first legally authorized American coinage."

THE GOLD FROG

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And so, I sat there listening to Seth and taking in every bit of historic information that I could get into my memory. As Seth went on and on about all the intricate design on these Colonial coins, struck just one at a time, I easily followed his logic with not a reason for surprise until he said: - - - -.

"Hence, this mystery still prevails, in spite of some occasional discovery of moderately sized hoards, amounting to more than just one (original) keg of the uncirculated Virginia Halfpennies, that there are yet several hundred thousand of the coins not clearly all accounted for - - - - and quietly known only to a few diligent researchers as the Black Hole. This missing portion of the original production has literally just vanished from the face of the earth. Perhaps many of those never distributed into circulation were shipped from the Virginia Treasury, for safer storage, during the fighting with the British. It wouldn't have been an advertised move of common knowledge. So, the kegs must have been misplaced during the 1789 period, when copper coinage became so unpopular, that someone must have carefully stored them in a very inaccessible and safe location, perhaps in a cave."

"Then again, Steve, the ravages of the American Civil War have been suggested as being responsible in their relocation into the Harpers Ferry region, since it seems that several of these copper coins have been found all along the banks of the Potomac River, clear down to the Three Sisters Islands at Washington, D.C. Mind you now, that what is now Harpers Ferry area was once a part of the proper map of Colonial Virginia."

"Seth, if the coins were stored in kegs, deep in caves, probably higher than the common flood level of the Potomac River, and still assumed not to have been found, how could individual coins have been found way downstream? How would such heavy little objects get all the way into the riverbed? I realize that such a question is perhaps purely hypothetical."

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"That's easy. Flood waters, abnormally high and extremely violent, often come with a major hurricane, with heavy rains lasting for several days. A violent crashing of waves in and out of a cave could cause an awful suction effect, pulling a few coins downriver."

"First, a keg might be weakened by the stress of time and dampness, combined. Then a wave breaks open the keg, spilling its contents over the floor. Then, the next wave, much less the next raging storm, could easily just sew the little copper discs like seeds in a trough."

"The caves in that area could date clear back to the indians of the pre-colonial period. Actually, I am just now, myself, currently tracing the activities of a little known New England Civil War regiment once located in this very region near Washington, D.C. and the secretive movements of the very famous John Mosby or Gray Ghost, whose gallant episodes seem certain to have mingled on several occasions with this unusually colorful regiment of Rhode Island Cavalry."

"Anyway, this recent theory of the Black Hole is a product of many hours of detailed research and just dozens of unusual accounts, both fact and theory, and it reflects the extreme lack of accountability of our very first legal coin of record. Conflicting stories seem to fortify the mysterious realm of its existence which was further complicated by mere inherent habits of the almost recluse-like collectors of the coinage. Every day, more and more tiny details of evidence are pointing to this conclusion. The precise size of the hoard of the Black Hole, which was aptly named after the unique phenomenon of a celestial abyss, has been approximated to be 16 kegs, at 24,000 coins per keg, and therefore would equal 380,000 copper Halfpennies. How's that for exactness? If transported intact, the total combined weight would have required an army to move it, all at once. It is also possible that these coins aren't all still in the original wooden kegs."

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"Historically, those British wooden kegs were 10 inches at the base or top, 13 inches in the beam, and exactly 23 and 1/2 inches tall. As the coins had not very much rim, this accounts for greater capacity per keg. And, they were filled by gross weight."

"Seth, finding all those coins would be quite an achievement! Just think of the historic value."

"Absolutely. But now, let's inspect this coin a lot closer. And, I'll try to classify it for you."

"Now, Steve, there are many varieties, different appearances of the arrangement of the letters and the symbols in the legends around the coin's rim, on both the front and the back side of these coppers. Hence, they either have, or are missing, a period after S in GEORGIVS on the obverse or front of the coin. On the reverse or back side, the harp in the lower left hand quadrant of the coat of arms of Colonial Virginia has variety in the number of harpstrings, either 6, 7, or 8. Let me look at it with my glass. Now, this one's only got 6. There, take the glass. Now, can you see the 6 strings?"

"Uh - - - oh, yes. They are quite distinct."

"There are very few of these with only 6 strings on the harp. While the grade is about a very fine, I see that it is showing moderate wear from circulation in honest trade, its rarity would depend on the exact variety set to which it belongs. Yes, there's just a little mystery involved, until you classify each one. The 6 strings on the harp do indicate this reverse is a Newman reverse B, the only 6-string harp reverse in the entire list of variety sets. But, two different obverse dies were matched with this reverse, Newman's # 5 and # 9. The basic difference between them being the exact die position of the X in REX, in its close proximity to a curl in front of the King's neck. The X almost touches the curl on the # 5 obverse."

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"On the # 9 obverse, the X is not as close to the curl, and the spacing is similar to that between most of the other letters. The rarer coin of these two is by far the # 5-B, variety set. And, this coin here of yours is a # 5-B, variety set! It's a very rare coin, indeed. And, it is your very first, too. You can not find another any more rare. It might sell for \$400."

"Whereas, an uncirculated one might bring \$2,000, or much more."

"Thank you for everything, Seth. I will keep in touch. This is all very interesting. Say, what would the effect be on the individual coin prices, if such a grand find occurred?"

"None, if the find continued to be in close hold. Afterall, those numbers were already assumed to be in the marketplace, already available. But, depending on the variety, rarity and grade, a sudden emergence of a large number of identical coins could cause a definite and disheartening drop in the current market price for that particular variety. Whereas, real value in these coppers is in the future, and therefore, they are well worth holding, for ever. As many are!"

"Thanks, Seth. See you again, sometime."

Putting away my rare 1773 Colonial Virginia coin, I left the hotel quickly and returned home, reflecting on how exciting this revelation has been. This puts a whole new light on things. This is not just something one can put on hold, for very long, not me, anyway!

A Metrorail ride later and I'm home. I will want to be able to refer to all this information that Seth gave me, so I'll write it down, in a sort of diary. I may write all of this up as part of a great discovery, someday. Who knows?

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter three

It's only 10:00 p.m. I'm going to make a listing of all the things that I'm going to want to take along with me, back into the tunnels. This is going to be a lot of fun. Going back will be much better this time. I'm going to be ready for anything. Although, I won't be able to carry great volumes of my food supplies and exploring equipment through the Lincoln Memorial, it's too public. But, I can carry all of it in a backpack, not all in one trip, without attracting any attention. Lots of tourists carry backpacks, even through tourist points such as monuments, as part of their day's gear.

I'll divide this list into two parts. One is for the supplies that I will need to survive, comfortably, and another will be for the special equipment that I'm going to want to help me make my way through all those tunnels more easily.

Little things like a compass and flashlight bulbs and batteries to last me for several days, I must not forget. But, even the larger items will be absolutely necessary, and heavy too. I must think: light weight.

Lots of things to get, tomorrow. All stores will be open. No problem. Plastic marine ropes, a hundred feet at least. Will need a heavy duty knife to dig my way through any small places, or to dig foot holds for climbing up or down dirt cliffs, also anchor ties, and swivel clips, - - - lots of useful gear.

Once I've gotten all this stuff inside the tunnel at the dirt storage room, I'll be better able to lug a lot of it all down to the Great Chamber. That will be my Command Post, or "CP," as they say. I will operate out of there.

However, making plans is nothing like the reality of a "hands on" experience. But now, I'm beginning to feel that this adventure is all coming together, in my mind's eye, Yes! And, I think I know exactly what to do about the big diamond in that pool of freezing cold water - - - it's simple, of course.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter

FOUR

Waterfall Blues

I managed to get every single item that I wanted. Now, all I have to do is to get it into the tunnel.

Monday morning, early, I'm right on target. This first tour has a guide named Nick. He leads us around and in less than 10 minutes, I'm standing right by the door to the equipment maintenance room. The tour has drifted out of sight. The door isn't locked. I'm in, over to the opposite wall. Now, off with the backpack and through the narrow crevice. It's a tight squeeze, but, I'm through, at last. I emptied the backpack and made my way back out into the next tour as it went by. I wore very inconspicuous clothes and never made a bit of eye contact, or got close to the tour guides. And, each time I went on the tour, I'd get a different tour guide. Great! Everything is working out fine.

I only had to make three trips with the tour, and was very careful to wear different clothes every time, to prevent anyone from getting an idea to follow me.

I'm going to take two smaller canvas bags of food and larger items on down to the Great Chamber and then come back. I'll leave my backpack full of the kind of things that I'll need for exploring tunnels during the next two days, starting with the waterfall, as soon as I come back. Having decided this, I quickly filled up the backpack. Then, I filled the two canvas bags, and I headed off toward the Great Chamber.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter four

About an hour later, I came to the Great Chamber, through entrance # 8. It took less time, coming back. It helps to know where you're going. It looks all the same, But, it - - - -. No, it's the same. The light is dim and the pool is full. I've been wondering just how this pool happens to have an unusual two-foot high retaining wall curving around the front 1/3rd of it, a foot wide at the top. Why wouldn't the water level be level with the floor, or just below floor level? But, no, it's raised two feet higher. Hmmm?

No GOLD FROG, today!

After resting for about a half hour, I remembered how I was going to "search" for more of those Virginia copper Halfpennies the very next time that I ever came back to this wee pool. Well, there's just barely good enough light to see whatever I might be digging around for. In fact, as the shadows in here so poorly define this area, that someone else could be standing in this chamber right now, with me, and I could not even tell, for sure. It's down right haunting or spooky. But, I "am" the only one down here.

I'll just sift my hands through this dry sand and see if I can find any more coins. Right about now, it would be handy to have a small metal detector. It may have been difficult to bring in without attracting any undue attention, however.

Well, I've been searching for 8 or 10 minutes and here's something - - - - over by entrance # 8, a small nut, no - - - - a button? Here's another one. I'll keep it. What is this? It looks like a piece of flat scrap iron, about two feet long and it's close to five inches wide, while only a 1/4 inch thick. I have been searching all along the retaining wall portion of the pool because that is generally the proximity where I found the first and only copper coin. Now, I am all the way over here at the right side of the pool. What is this? I've found another copper!

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter four

Finally! Another copper coin. Yes, it's another Virginia Halfpenny. Ah, here's another and three more together. Here's two more, and another, and two more. They're all Virginia Halfpennies. That about seems to be all of 'em. Can't find another. Each one looks to be well circulated. Several seem almost black instead of copper. How many coins do I have now? Uh, - - - eight, nine, ten, plus the one I'd found earlier makes eleven.

I have searched all around here and there doesn't seem to be any more. So, these ten were all over next to the pool, close to entrance # 1. Interesting. All but one were found together, and the solitary one pops up over there, by itself. Sometime, someone must have had a lot more and spilled these few by the pool. Was there once a much larger cache stored here? Wonder if it was? And, how did they get the coins in, much less out of here? Maybe, I'll find that answer, later.

I'm glad I found these other Halfpennies, but I'm eager to get back to the waterfall, next. But, before going, I wonder if I should try to do something to put a security check in place, such as, smoothing out this sandy floor, a 2-foot width all around - - - nah.

All the food here is in metal containers and will not spoil. Everything else that I'll need for today's exploring, including something to eat, is in the backpack. And, that's where I'm headed now.

First, I'll make my way back up to the waterfall. Then, I'll get back here later - - - today, I hope, because I don't want to sleep in these tunnels, again. Not anywhere but in this very chamber.

About, an hour later - - - here's the backpack, at the narrow little stream. I'll have an apple while I'm walking down the path towards the waterfall, a red juicy one. This is good for energy, just what I need. I want to study this waterfall very closely.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter four

Say, wait a minute. As I get closer to it, I can not hear the usual roar of the waterfall. Instead, it is rather muffled, now. I had not paid much attention to it earlier. Now, there is just a "purr." Checking the stream, this water level is lower, less volume. I will have to check this out further.

At the bottom of the waterfall, I can see there's much less water coming down. Also, the water level in the pool is much lower. Obviously, when I was here on my last visit, the volume over the falls caused a roar and the higher water level was helping to hide the old exit point from view. But, I still don't see it. Now with the flash, I see there is still a wet apron along the edge - - - hey. What's this?

Little tracks. Frog tracks? Here? How could it be? All the way up here. Another frog, maybe. That, I would like to see.

They're clearly going toward the waterfall. With the flash, I can now see right through this water that is pouring over the falls. The frog tracks seem to go right on behind the falls. I see something now that I had not noticed before. Behind the falls, there is an opening like a doorway cut into the cliff behind. So, when the water level in the pool is high, it must exit the area through this doorway. Now, the water is just above the sill.

The frog tracks go toward and within four feet of the doorway, before getting lost in the exiting water. Looking in - - - I can't make out what - - - now I see. The floor is down, well, two or three feet down, below the doorsill. A ramp leads down into a circular small room and it's got a dome-like ceiling. The ramp is a step up and it doesn't appear that it could carry the bulk of the exiting water away. Along the wall to the left, the narrow ramp winds downward. The unlevel floor seems to slope towards the doorway, above. It's sandy and, or course, partly covered with water.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter four

Furthermore, having taken my shoes off before I'd ever entered, and as I walk around in my bare feet, it is quite slippery. In only about three inches of calm water, at this point - - - - wait a minute. There's a harder, smooth sandstone-like floor under the sand. I need to clear away some sand or - - - - . What's this - - - - blue dots? They seem to form a circle, around - - - - four feet in diameter. Clearing away the rest of the whole circle, I can now see something etched in the hard surface. It's a map. The "Map!" It must be - - - - . It's in the blue - - - - dots! "In blue!"

This must be the Map of the GOLD FROG Riddle. Of course, find the "Map in blue out of sight." Totally. Out of sight, I'll say. No one would have ever really found this map, under normal circumstances. With more water coming down over the falls, no one would ever be aware of the need to assess the floor under this sand, deep water - - - - no way. I am so fortunate, even to have found this. You bet. "Out of sight!"

There, I've finished my sketch. But, what's this lone blue dot just over here, up to the top? Is it in one of these tunnels? There aren't any large chambers indicated with eight entranceways. It seems that only the most important tunnels are represented. There are only five and I only know one of these five tunnels.

This Map is, in itself, a clue. It's supposed to "lead the to the light." Once again, that little frog has been instrumental in pointing out a clue. As I've been waiting for this moment, I am ready to pursue the next clue, - - - - to "the light."

Take a last look at the Map on the floor. Here's the one blue dot. Here's the waterfall, yes, way over here to the left side. So the blue dot is somewhat in a line due North of here, but at which level? That is not the "correct direction" of the Great Chamber, with the pool. At the best, it is much farther off, to the northeast.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter four

Now, what I want to do next, is to find a way out of here. I need to find the exit. Where is the water going, anyway? Back at the doorway, over to the right side, and along the side - - - over to, ah. Here it is! And, I wouldn't have found it, at all, if it were not for the water being lower than it normally is. It looks like another trough, a teller's window again, at the bottom of the wall and slightly lower than most of the floor. It's about a foot deep. Not bad, only the backpack, won't make it. I'll have to take some of it out, first, then put it back, after I'm through.

I'm through. Damn! All wet. Any more water and I could have drowned. I hope this water stays low, if I have to come back through this way, or I'll be stuck on this back side. The water force alone could be too much to counter, trying to go back.

Here is some kind of platform, the area drops off to a small stream carrying off the runoff water. But, there's no way out - - - except up here to the left, about four feet up, there's a hole in this wall. It's a crawl space. As I'm going on through, I find myself doing a five-foot drop to the floor of another totally dark tunnel. It looks a lot like the tunnel coming up from the Great Chamber, but this tunnel is heading due North. Both go downward from the falls area.

To review the recent changes in elevation, I must have been just about 120 feet above the floor level of the Great Chamber, as I was standing at the top of the waterfall. Then, at the bottom of the falls, I was 20 feet lower. Going down into the Map room and on under the wall, I was another 4 feet lower. That is a total difference of 96 feet. Then, as I climbed up into the crossover hole, 4 feet up and then down another 5 feet to the tunnel going due North, or a difference of just 95 feet above the floor of the Great Chamber.

This tunnel should never be used by anyone, else, unless they had first discovered that hidden Map room.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter four

And now, that I have found a crossover hole which connects with this tunnel, wonder what "mischief" does lurk within my uncertain "destination?" While it does seem to be leading to the blue dot on the Map, I can't help but be curious.

As for being the only one to ever use this tunnel since the Map was made, no one would ever find me down here in a hundred years, actually ever. If I slip and fall into a gully or stream and get stuck down here, I would be here for good!

So far, the Riddle is still safe with me, but I'm working on it. It will belong to me if I can find it, or, why else would the GOLD FROG have even bothered to challenge me with the Riddle?

Perhaps, it's all just a test for greed. This is not a case of greed. It's much more a pragmatic thing than that. Afterall, why should such great wealth all go to waste by staying buried where no one else could ever appreciate it? Unless, of course, it's to be the judgement of Fate that the wrong people always seem to end up with and thus appreciate such wealth.

This time, the prize will be mine.

This northbound tunnel does not seem to have been "marked" with a number or letter so far, just like the others. It does not go to the South, but starts right here. I guess if you knew where you were going in all this tunnel system, then you wouldn't have to mark any of these tunnels.

Where is my canteen? I'm thirsty. Here it is in my backpack. Just a little, now. I'll have to ration this out and make it last. I have come just 150 yards and the compass keeps pointing due North.

Just the achievement of being the "first to solve the Riddle" would be a real treasure, in itself.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter four

It is quite natural, I guess, to wonder if anyone else has so much as even been aware that there is such a Riddle? Ohhhh, maybe it will be gone when I finally get there. But, no. Or else, why would the frog have even told me about it through the GOLD FROG Riddle, in the first place?

Wait a minute. I just realized something. Since this Riddle business all came to me in a feverish type of dream, a hallucinating dream at that, could be I am just chasing my tail in a circle, here. There may not even be any hidden treasure. Then, on the other hand, there was the Map "in blue" and "out of sight," hidden in that small circular room behind the falls.

So, there does seem to be some truth, not to even mention hard evidence, in the Riddle. Of course, when one is a nonbeliever in any particular thing, they can always find a reason to give up and quit.

After I've tracked down all the clues and succeed in solving the Riddle, I will establish a special bond between myself and the one who created this challenge. Then, I will be able to stand there and say quietly to myself: "this is the answer" to all of those questions that I had, all along the way to the final discovery.

Uhmhm, these raisins are good. They're just what I needed. I've now come about a mile, and I don't see any sign of this tunnel ending. Wait a minute - - - something is different. The walls have disappeared or - - - and the floor is just a path, exactly down the center. The floor is gone. In its place, there seems to be a bridge, or something. Yes, I can feel it. It is - - - stone, a stone bridge, about 20 feet across and rounded - - - kind of like a cigar, about 3 feet in diameter, in the middle and largest part. The very ends are small. This could be very dangerous to cross over, with nothing to hold on to.

I hear water, again. It's moving. But, where?

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter four

Be careful! This floor drops off into absolutely nothing. There is no support, at all, underneath this stone bridge, that I can see. The path across the top side is not flat or smooth and looks kinda "tricky."

If I fall, no one will ever find me, in here.

I wonder if it's safe, if it will hold my weight?

After checking out the stone bridge for about all of ten minutes, I guess the only thing I can do now is try it and see if it will hold up while I cross it.

This is dangerous, but I can not quit, now. I'll just have to cross over. Wonder why it is right here? On the other hand, if it weren't here, then this would be the end of the road. This new challenge could be a final step to reaching the "light" in the Riddle. So, I've got to cross over, just to find out. My flash is shining on the stream below. It's about 65 feet down.

Let's see just exactly how far it is down to this stream below. I'll need to know later. I've got some white surveyor's twine, 200 feet of it. I'll tie this oblong stone, about the size of a large carrot, at one end of the twine and let it down into the crevasse, all the way down to the stream bed.

There! It hit bottom. The twine has gone slack. I'll take up the slack, now, and I'll tie a knot right here at the height of the top of the bridge, over here on this side. Then as I wind up the twine, around the crotch of my thumb and around my elbow, forming a loop of about 2 feet, I can finally see how far it is clear down to the stream bed. Just about finished, now. It is exactly 65 feet. Well, I've got plenty of rope.

As for my current elevation, I'd say that I might have dropped about 45 feet, as a result of coming down this tunnel. So, I must be at least 50 feet above the floor level of the Great Chamber.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter four

Before I attempt to cross this stone bridge, I'll leave my backpack here. I'm going to take out the two 50-foot, half-inch diameter, plastic ropes and tie the both of them together. Then, with a heavy knot on one end, and sitting straddling this end of the bridge, it can just be whipped down, under, and - - - up again.

There! It's around the stone. Now, tie a double half hitch, to secure it good. Then, I'll tie a knot, about every three feet, the entire length of the rope, for climbing assistance, if necessary. Now, I'll just tie this other end around my waist. I'm smaller at my waist than at my armpits. Well, maybe not, anymore.

By continuing to straddle the bridge and slide on across on the seat of my pants, I'm making pretty good headway. It's a little slower going here at the wider middle part. Now, it is easier again here toward this far side. The bridge is not level. This stone bridge slopes up at about a 15 degree angle, to the North. I can see the beam on my flash reflecting off the narrow crevice above. It gets lower to my right, eastwardly. In fact, off to my right, it comes down within 10 feet of the stone bridge's level, and it continues to go on down as it goes eastward.

I'll tie the flash's handle securely to a loop of twine around my belt on my right side, so I won't drop it. I'm across, at last.

The tunnel continues straight ahead, for about 30 feet, then turns left, sharply, for almost - - - Ah! I'm fallin'? Arms down, keep arms down! Must grab on to something. Can't see anything. Am I going to die? Uh! End of the rope! My armpits are burning. Ooouw, it's hard to get my breath. Rope is too tight.

I'm hanging at the end of the rope. I'm safe. I am okay. I still have the flash. It's on. I - - - must have stepped off of a ledge, or into a hole. The rope is holding, of course.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter four

Where am I? How far did I fall? Let me look for the bottom. I'm in a cylindrical hole, but - - - - it - - - - there is "no bottom." Can't see the bottom at all, just endless darkness. The flash just fades into nothing, just darkness. It looks like I must have had a fall of about 20 feet. Not bad. It could have been fatal, without the rope. The ceiling is weird. It is way up there, and it appears to have thousands of tiny sparkling particles, when the flash is put directly on it, like tiny mirrors, all white, no colors. They all sparkle as though they were all moving slightly.

I'm O.K., I guess. Glad I tied these knots good. They're working just fine. I'm finally back up to the ledge where I stepped off. Must rest, now, just for a few minutes. All of a sudden I'm tired, very tired.

Hey, - - - I must have dozed off. I don't know for how long, because I don't really know what time it was, when I climbed back up the rope. An hour, maybe? I feel stiff. Got to move around some. Rope burns!

Well, this was almost the end of the road for me. There doesn't seem to be any way out - - - - no ledge, no exit points, nothing - - - -. Those knots were all I needed. They worked fine. And now, I'm out of here and back to the stone bridge where I can "reorganize." Be there soon. Almost there. Here we are. On my way back, crossing to this side, I still can't believe how close I came to loosing everything. I'm just going to be more careful.

Wait a minute. Where's my canteen? I forgot all about it. I had it - - - - in my hand, before I fell, just before I fell. It's gone now. I'm without water for now. My closest drinking water is now all the way back with my other supplies in the Great Chamber. All I have is this orange, and I need it now.

Ten minutes later, and I'm ready to continue. My flash is still strong. No need to change batteries.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter four

The only unexplored route remaining for me now is the stream below. It may be an exit. I'll leave this rope, just in case I have to come back this way again. Not that I want to have to climb back up here, 65 feet from below, but I just may have to, if I can't find my way out down there.

With my backpack on, I'm over the side! While on the way down, - - - I just realized this area is the exact one indicated by the blue dot on the Map, at the end of this tunnel. And, I went to the very end. Or, is the stone bridge, perhaps, what the blue dot was on or supposed to designate as the key - - - to finding the "light?" Well, I'm on my way. I "must" be almost there. I can hear the water rushing much louder, now.

Ah, feet wet. Yes, I made it. It's a foot deep. There are lots of small rocks, under the surface, most are baseball size, and a few larger ones, but not very many. This stream is only 10 to 12 feet wide, but not swift moving. It just flows gently in an eastward and narrow tunnel, 115 degrees on my compass.

Now the walls are closing in, while I follow this stream eastward. The ceiling is also coming down too, just as rapidly. It is only seven feet wide here, and the ceiling is about 5 feet above water level. There, the water is deeper now. This is getting a little too close in here, now - - - only 4 feet wide, 3 feet or so deep, and 2 feet above water level. Ah, this seems to be getting much better. Here is a chamber with its sandy beach on the right side. The stream now becomes more like a pool here, almost 25 feet across.

This stream continues on ahead, at just about the same width as when I first entered it, at the bridge.

So far, it seems that I must have come at least a 150 yards, in an eastwardly direction. Wonder what is directly overhead, on the surface? I must be north of the Orange line. Hard to judge distance, in here.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter four

Looking all around this chamber, with its curving and irregular ceiling, about 11 feet high, I don't see anything. Still looking. There's a tall rock over at the back wall of the beach side. There seems to be an uneven space - - - a narrow passageway. Yes, a door or entrance to another tunnel. It becomes a ramp-like tunnel, immediately. I'm going up. But, before I go, I need to assess my net drop in elevation. Must track my progress elevationwise, continuously.

At the stone bridge, I was 50 feet above what the floor level of that point in the Great Chamber where I found 11 Virginia Halfpennies. Dropping approximately 65 feet down to this stream and then coming almost 150 yards downstream, I must be 17 or 18 feet "below" that standard point in the Great Chamber. And, this stream would probably be pretty close, on a straight line, to that general area, or just below it. I can check that out later, whenever I continue on downstream.

Right now, I don't have a single drop of drinking water. I don't trust this stream water at all. I can only hope that this ramp goes right up to the surface. Here's hoping. I could be about 220 or 230 feet below the surface, at this location in the city. This looks like a very promising tunnel. It begins as a straight ramp-like tunnel, eastward for 45 feet, then it begins spiraling left, with about a 30-foot wide spiral while continuing as a ramp, up, up. I can't even keep track of the change in my elevation after I left the stream. After resting a few minutes, I continued, up, up, up.

Finally, I come to a shaft of light, just a faint little thin wisp of light. But, ohhh, what a welcome sight. Is this it, the "light" I've been looking for? I think not. No. This should be the surface. Yes, I have found the surface, but there is only a thin crack in - - - a wall. I'm behind a concrete wall of some kind. I can see handles on the opposite wall - - -.

They're on panels. No, they're on drawers!

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter four

Whoow, this wall moved. It fell out. I am in an old compartment of - - - a little house. Whoops! I have somehow surfaced inside an old crypt, in somewhat of a small uptown cemetery. There are iron gates, and - - - there are tombstones outside.

It's daylight. I forgot to check my watch. It's almost 6 p.m. Even if I can get out of here, I should wait 'til after dark, so that I won't be seen leaving.

Upon closer examination, I'd say - - - this old crypt hasn't been in use for many many years. Some of the drawers have been left open. Whoomp, Whoomp! The other drawers also seem to be - - - whoomp, empty.

"Wait until after dark - - - in a crypt - - - in a cemetery." Wonderful!

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter

FIVE

Baker's Dozen

Dark at last. Now, to try these iron gates, they are not locked. Good! Just lift this lever - - - . It's stuck! Just my luck. There probably hasn't been anybody - - - bad choice of words - - - anyone who has visited this particular crypt for years. It's not rusty, just misaligned and too much weight on this one side - - - there, I've got it. And, I am out. Now, merely walk as though I am just "respectfully" passing through. Quietly, now.

Must make note of the street signs, so that I can remember how to find my way back here, again.

There is a Coke machine. Great, I can use a cold drink. Then I'll catch a cab down to Metrorail, and I will be home in an hour. I'm going to sleep very good tonight.

Tomorrow, I want to get a replacement canteen for the one I lost, today. And that reminds me, I need to remember to get a very special item, to take back with me to the Great Chamber, bulky but not too heavy while - - - very special.

Here is a cab. Hi, I'd like to go to the nearest Metrorail station. Foggy Bottom is closest? O.K.

Well, only a couple of blocks. This is great. I can find my way back, easily.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter five

Foggy Bottom? Thank you, sir, and good evening.

Well, while I am waiting for the next Orange line train to Virginia, I want to take a better look at one of the two buttons I found by the pool, along with the 10 additional Virginia Halfpennies. Let me see. Here - - - I've found one. It's greenish, about the size of my thumbnail, and it appears to be made of a light-weight metal. It couldn't be! But, I think it "is" a Civil War military uniform button, probably off one of the Union soldier's jackets. Let's look again. There is an anchor on it, and it has letters, too. There is more - - -. I'll be damned: Yankees! Of course, this is Washington. And, Seth was apparently dead right about New England troops being involved. This button surely does belong to a Rhode Island regiment.

Tomorrow, I'm going over to the county library in Arlington and check this Civil War thing out to my own satisfaction. It should have everything I would want.

There are several implications that "various time periods" overlap within those tunnels. Who knows when they were formed - - - maybe, hundreds of years ago, except for the ramp up to the crypt. It was done more recently, and was most likely dug from the bottom, up. Where did they put all of that dirt? Washed away down stream? Whatever. Although, the very earliest humans in here should have been Indians. I haven't found any evidence at all of their presence, anywhere, yet. So, there could have been members of various Pirate crews, investigating the Potomac waters. The ships they were sailing were small enough to make it this far up river before running aground. That lone piece of strap iron is the only physical link that I've found, so far, and that's a bit thin. I will need to find something just a little more positive, even though the tunnels appear to have their origin close to the river.

What I need to tend to more closely are my coins. Ahh, train is coming. It's the Orange line. I'm off.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter five

Now, these Virginia Halfpennies are colonial, but they most likely were not brought into the tunnels for quite some time later, in the mid-1800's, or about the time of the Civil War. It's possible, at that time, a lot more of these coins could have been stored away in there, even "kegs" of them. But none of that directly ties into the GOLD FROG's escapades of the more recent years. Apparently, this frog has just inherited these tunnels. Maybe, he was attracted by the appeal of the pool, so secluded and private.

There are questions, yet unanswered. Just one of which is: where did the frog go, after he spit the big diamond out into the center of the pool? Is this pool his nest? Its murky bottom may hold many secrets.

Home again. I'm going to get some sleep, now.

Ah, it's morning. Almost 9 o'clock. I've got to get moving. After picking up my new canteen, I intend to stop by the county library.

Here's the library, now to find the section which pertains to the Civil War. What I really want to get, is any in-depth writing on troop movements in the many local geographic areas, specifically Harpers Ferry. I see a good place to start. Here's a book on the brave exploits of one John S. Mosby, a southern gentleman, a partisan Ranger of the Confederacy, and avid Commander of the 43rd Virginia Battalion of Cavalry. During his forays into Union Army supply trains and smaller troop encampments, all over the very heart of Virginia, it's recorded that there were several occasions where he or his regiments encountered the Rhode Island Cavalry.

These Rhode Island troops are mentioned elsewhere as being on special assignment in the Washington area. There seems to be much mystery in their role. It is a well documented fact that they reconnoitered along the Potomac and Harpers Ferry area, on at least two unique occasions. However, no fighting transpired.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter five

Nor was there even any "contact" made with any of the Confederate troops. So, what were these "Yankees" doing up the Potomac? Were they on light intelligence reconnaissance or what, I wonder?

I feel much better now. I do think that Seth was definitely on the right track. And, so am I. I think the "Black Hole" does exist. And, now, I think that I too know where it might have been at one point, in the 1860's. Now, the only question is whether it has been found, by accident and moved to a new location. That, being the case, there won't be any Christmas.

If Seth's theory is correct, it probably is still hidden deep in the back reaches of a natural cavern.

Well, so much for the Civil War period. And, so, it's back to the present. Tomorrow morning, I'm going back into the tunnels.

Back home, again. I'm going to finish reading in this Civil War diary, of an old "ferry" operator's own account of Union troop crossings into Virginia in 1862 and 1863. There are definite indications of crossings by the Rhode Island troops in early 1863, both ways.

Finished, at last. I have found some interesting leads, made notes and now I'm going to get some sleep. I'm just dead tired. Time to call it a night.

It has been a good day. I'm very tired, sleepy.

I'm floating just three feet off the ground. I'm in a military camp, just outside of a small town. The name on a broken down sign says: "Berryville." I'm in Virginia! It's nearly sundown, still there's a little light left. Camp fires are visible everywhere. Civil War? Must be Union Army soldiers. Confederate troops wouldn't have open fires like this, to give away their position. Only Union troops would. I'm coming near a tent, now. There are sentries posted everywhere.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter five

I seem to pass right on through them, without any problem of being noticed. No one seems to even see me at all. It's like I am invisible. The lantern inside is casting many shadows on the tent walls. It must be a meeting of Regiment commanders. I am right outside, now. One voice, louder than the others is questioning why they are in this vicinity. Another, is cautioning the former to lower his voice or everyone will hear.

Another member of the group asks to see the Rebel diary. Diary? He's saying that a new location of the treasury may - - - yes, the Treasury is no longer in Richmond, but it has been recently transported, North. North! This was done to deceive the Union backers, so they would never look for it that close to Washington.

So, the secret was kept in a Rebel diary!

As, that exact new location was known only to the transporters, it appears that the author of the diary, now dead, was one of them. He was bushwhacked, on the road to Hillsboro, coming from Harpers Ferry, escorted by two men, who had joined him in Charles Town. As it happens, the diary's author was the only one killed in the group. The two escorts had run off when the first shot found its mark.

The Rebel diary had then fallen to the possession of this Union officer who now says he doesn't have the slightest notion where to look for their hiding place of the Confederate cache. That is why he's discussing the riddle in the diary with his men. As there should be plenty to share, why not get help? He's saying the riddle? Yes! There. He's repeating it. I think.

"Exact location of the keep,

Seen only on coppers of 12."

Someone is attacking the picket to the West. The tent now empties and - - - -. It's quiet. I'm alone!

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter five

I'm chilled. Ohhh, I'm awake again. I must have been dreaming about something. Can't remember what.

It's morning! There's my alarm. It's 4 o'clock. Still dark. Got to get going. After I get everything I need to take back with me, I'll pack it all right on down to Foggy Bottom.

The morning is fine. I can't wait to get back to the stream, where I left off.

It's still dark as I reach the crypt. It's still unlocked. I'm in again. My flash is working. Here's where I came up, before. Yes. Everything is okay and I'm back in the ramp tunnel, going down, easy does it. This is a very narrow tunnel. The floor is at about a 30 degree slope. As I'm going down, swallowing to pop my ears due to the sudden change in elevation, I begin now to recall what I was dreaming about earlier during the night. It's all coming back to me. Yes, - - - all of it, now. And the Civil War riddle. Yes, hmmm.

Wait a minute! I've just realized something from my dream last night. Reading up on the Civil War like I did, must have resurfaced in that dream.

The riddle of the Rebel diary made reference to a location somewhere. I must remember the riddle. Uhh, "Exact location of the keep, seen only on coppers 12," maybe. Yes. Must be on some Virginia Halfpennies.

Now, I've got two riddles, one's related to these tunnels and the other one to something that apparently was here at one time and then later moved.

Here I am, at the small beach, beside the stream.

Wait a minute, I found 11 such coins right beside the pool in the Great Chamber. I've still got them in my backpack, wrapped in a soft piece of felt - - - . Here, safely in this little leather coin pouch.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter five

I forgot to examine them to see if any had an "M" or any other such letter etched on them. But now I do really want to see if any other letters show up.

"Here" we are! Let's take a look at one. It's a light brown, fair condition. Ah. There is something.

There is quite a small letter etched on this one. It's like the letter "M" on the first coin I found and showed to Seth. Only, this letter is a "V" and it too is in the upper right quadrant of the reverse.

However, why were these coins seeded out into the sand, over by the pool? And, how did these few happen to have been in the Great Chamber, at all?

When did they get there? And, who brought them?

The real question is: How many coins were in that Great Chamber, originally? Why were these special few left? The answer may be back in the Great Chamber, or the entire story may just be right here, in the coins.

Let me see if my other 9 coins have a similar wee etched symbol on them. The flash is strong. My light is very good. I'll just lay them out here on the sand by the stream. Now, let's see.

Yes!! Each coin has a letter. One has a number. And, all the symbols are located in the same place, on the upper right quadrant, amid the fleur-de-lis.

In the Civil War dream, the riddle from the Rebel diary mentioned 12 copper coins. Perhaps, my own mind created this circumstance of 12 coins, fictitiously.

All because I had concentrated so hard on how the subject of the American Civil War figured into the way these copper coins might have been shipped elsewhere.

Curious, how lucky I was to find these 11 coins.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter five

But, I found only these 11. Otherwise, I wonder, how could my mind know anything that I don't even know consciously? Then again, who knows exactly what their subconscious really knows?

The lot look like this: "H-I-V-E-I-S-2-F-A-M-E."

After thinking about these letters and why merely the one number, I've finally concluded that the number probably reflects a relative distance "from" some well known, time safe, reference point, such as, 2 miles or "MI," which indeed were two of the letters I found. I need to write these characters down, to facilitate any analysis I will make and think about them some more as I continue on down this stream.

If there were 12 coins instead of these 11 that I have, then, I'm missing one letter or number. That'll add to my "suspense." I'll be very lucky if I am only missing that one copper coin. I can work around it, I think. Somehow, I doubt if it would be a number.

It's time to put all these coins away safely now, and for me to get started downstream. I've got everything together, and it is time to move out.

This water looks the same and feels just as cool.

Continuing east-southeast, by compass, I soon see that there's a pile of rocks, varying in diameter from a foot to three feet, right in the middle third of the stream. The ceiling comes down again, and just beyond this point, to a height of eight feet above the water. The water gets a foot deeper around either side of the pile of rocks. So, I'm going to climb over and try to see what's on the other side, downstream.

This isn't too bad, here. Careful, don't want to sprain an ankle in this pile, because I've got far too much more exploring to do, yet. Over the top, now. I can see smaller rocks for at least another 50 feet.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter five

Now, the going is much easier. The rocky surface changes to sand. It's a sand bar, about 10 feet wide, with water on either side, at a three-foot width. How deep, exactly, I don't know, and I'm not getting in.

Walking along on the sand bar, I keep thinking of the letters on the coins. Whatever their real meaning is, could it be related to that of the Civil War dream riddle? The prize may be hidden - - - - in a cave, in a water well, in an old stone iron furnace, or even in an old railroad tunnel. So, for sure - - - - there is no "X," and the actual location most likely is a word, unless "X" is the missing letter. I'd doubt that.

The sand bar continues. In fact, it's getting to be just a little wider, now. That something that an X could have represented is possibly a "cave." They are more easily accessible, and are found - - - - all over and ready made. There's an "AVE" among these letters, but no "C." Hmmm, so, AVE "IS," yes, and "IS" is also found among the letters. "AVE IS 2" what, uh, "miles" from? Yes, "MI" is here. But "from" doesn't seem all that applicable. Uh, "AVE IS 2" East, yes "E" fits in very nicely, too. That's it! I have it. It must be! And now, I know the destination to which the riddle of the coins is referring. Of course. But, it will have to wait for another day. First, comes the GOLD FROG!

Right now, I've come about 400 yards and the sand bar is being replaced by shallow water. What should I do if the water got to be too deep, over my head? Oh, I don't want to think about that. I must keep going.

I must get as far as the Great Chamber.

The false clue seems to indicate clearly that the lone blue dot on the Map was at the end of that tunnel which had the stone bridge. It was not! There wasn't anything there for a living soul to find. It was only a trap, a way of getting rid of anyone that might have found the Map by accident.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter five

Question is, why wasn't I warned of that possible danger? I didn't find it by accident, but on purpose. Now, I think that the lone blue dot just may be at the Great Chamber, right where all of this began. But, it is puzzling. Why? Why go all around - - - -, unless, - - - - ? Well, of course. That, must be it. I will keep going. I've come about three quarters of a mile, and - - - - here is a ramp going off to the right. It is about 6 feet wide and rises abruptly, straight away and towards where I would imagine the Great Chamber is located. I must now be almost 30 feet below the floor of the Great Chamber.

But, for now, I'll just leave my backpack, not my coins, right here and continue downstream. This can't go much farther, if I'm right.

Twenty minutes later, after resting, I once again continue on my way, downstream. And soon as I've gone only 30 yards, it immediately turns southward, just as I thought it should. Having gone another 100 yards, I find that the stream terminates. Here is a solid wall of white granite. This 12-foot wide stream just slips quietly away, right under the wall.

That's it. I'm at a dead end. What I am looking for is obviously elsewhere. So, I'm headed on back to the tunnel where I left my backpack, and it better pay a dividend. I think it will.

Here's the tunnel and my pack. I need batteries. I must rest, too. I want to be sure to check the pool to see if I can make out what's on the bottom clearly. O.K., I'm ready to go again. As I take this ramp-like tunnel up, it curves gently to the right and now comes to a fork, with a smaller one going to the left. I'll take the main tunnel to the right, for now. And, I'll check out the one to the left, later. This one to the right is still rising and - - - - yes, now I can see a faint light ahead. It's growing stronger as I go. If this is going where I think it is, - - - - yes, it is.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter five

Another 40 feet and I'm here again - - - in the Great Chamber. I did it! I'm back. Just exactly the very place where I thought I might wind up. The light shafts are very strong. I can see almost every detail in here. Now, that's a bit odd.

The one detail that I had not ever really noticed before is that while the ceiling over the main part of the chamber must be at least 65 feet high, the one big exception is the area directly over the pool, where it is about 15 feet high. I wonder? Why is that area so different, without light?

The two sacks of supplies that I left behind look just fine.

The pool of water is - - - ouch, still cold and I still can't see the bottom clearly. While the light is strong, there're gray silt-like particles suspended in the water, starting about 6 or 7 feet deep, down to the bottom.

I wonder if the GOLD FROG - - - if he can somehow cross over - - - to a second pool, not one which would be visible from here, within this chamber?

It's possible. There could be one. It should be an equal in elevation, if it had - - - some overflow characteristic. It should be somewhat higher, but not likely - - - lower than this one. Also, it could be directly connected or even remote. Directly connected would be my guess, if it is true. If it is not, then, where did the little frog go?

But, all this - - - doesn't bring me any closer to the "light" in the GOLD FROG Riddle. That's what I must concentrate on, now. I feel that I'm closer.

Then again, - - - maybe it's all in my mind. No! The Map is real. The Riddle will be solved. I'm just too slow to see it.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter five

Truthfully now, did I expect this adventure to be easy? Would I want it to be simple? No. Well, let's face it. I am - - - - a little - - - - stupid. O.K., I admit it. Let's work from there.

Huh, I'm not as stupid as - - - - some. Oh, face reality. I'm at a dead end. Wait a minute, I haven't checked out all of my options, yet. Anybody who would be enterprising enough to crawl in and out of a crypt, can't be without some merit. Yeah, I'm one of a kind.

Afterall, who the Hell else would come down here, if they were in their right mind?

I must think more about the frog's wording of the Riddle. Subconsciously, I may already know the answer to - - - - where the "light" is at.

I guess I am just going to have to play a "trump" card. I was hoping for a break, a revelation, or sign of some kind. Really, I've been pretty lucky, so far. But, now, all I've got is - - - - "zip," nothing. So, out pops my 100 feet of clear plastic 3/4-inch tubing. What for, the little frog might ask? Why, to "siphon" out the damn cold water from this little pool.

Let's see - - - - I'll tie on a good sized weight to one end that will not rise easily, a small crowbar. Yes, great! Now, we're cookin'. Just drop the weight down. Kerplunk. Gotcha! Ummm, let's see how deep it really is, 'cause that's going to determine how far it has to go over and - - - - down tunnel #1, down toward the stream below. Now, who's stupid?

And, the depth of the pool is - - - - 20 feet, or give or take a few inches. This "is" going to work.

Actually, it is the weight of a liquid within the longer, yet lower end of the tube that causes this act of the siphoning effect to work. Carefully, I am over to entrance #1, inside now and going down, down, down.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter

SIX

Night Things

Keep going. Don't stop. There, 100 feet and now I'll suck on it, real hard. Harder! Need to continue to build up the suction. Don't let it slip back, now. Oh, my ears feel like they're going to pop.

Nothing, yet. Uhhhhh. Still nothing! You wimp. Can't even - - - Ooooh, damn! I wasn't expecting it - - - to do that. Ah, it's working! It's draining. Now, we'll see who's the brightest of them all.

Now, I've got to get back to this "light" source. I'm losing valuable time. Okay. Back to the chamber, again. The light from these shafts is still strong.

The GOLD FROG Riddle said the Map will lead me to the light. Well, it has not - - - or has it? There is a lone blue dot. That must be here. This is where the tunnels and stream have brought me. I'm back, in full circle and with a new outlook.

Let me see my pad where I wrote all of the Riddle down. Yes, here it is. Ah! The light is bound to be out of sight, as it is where "he sleeps." "Must catch him with great stealth." That means finding where his nest is, where he goes off to sleep. When, exactly do they sleep? They're up all night, makin' racket. So, they must sleep during the daytime. That's now. But, I first saw the frog on the Metrorail platform, during the day. So where does he go when he leaves the pool?

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter six

And, just how does he get there?

Looking around, at the edges of the pool, to just below the water line, I can see several creature-made, small holes, about the size of a grapefruit. That may be where he goes, alright. But, I can't tell if these connect with another pool or go off to another room.

There must be another way of finding - - - . I must think! "Raise the flag over his nest." Uh, that will have to wait. That is getting too far ahead, for now. I'll have to search through the remainder of the tunnels and see what pops up.

Hopefully, when I do see this "light," everything else will just fall into place. The size of my siphon tube is very small in relationship to the overall size or volume of the pool. It will take many hours for it to empty all that water. In the mean time, I am going to find out where each of these tunnel entrances lead.

The tunnel of entrance #1 is alright, for now. I will check out the other fork of it later. Or maybe I should do it now. No. Each tunnel in its "numerical" order. I'll do it later. Afterall, it is headed away from the Great Chamber, and it probably doesn't go off to anywhere important. Of course, it does go upwards. It might be an exit or the original main entrance.

Finding another way out, to the surface, would be a most welcome event. It would make a difference just "where it came out." But, that's another time.

Right now, I've got the hungries. I want to find something to eat, - - - and a good drink, too.

Been eating a half hour, now. Got to get back to work. It must be getting close to 11 a.m. I've still got a lot to do before this light fades. Entrance #8, that tunnel is O.K. Entrance #3, let's see - - - it goes 15 feet, turns to the right and goes right again.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter six

Well I'll be - - - - it comes out at entrance #4. What the - - - - ? On to the next. Number 5, - - - - goes upward, towards where I would think the Metrorail would be. Up, up, up. Yes, this seems like the right tunnel. It retraces the route I came in on, that very first day. It curves gently to the right and upward.

I've come about 120 yards, now. Whoops, here's a dead end! This looks like a recent cave-in. Wouldn't guess there is a chance - - - - what's that? It feels like a train going by - - - - Metrorail, yeah. So, it was the right tunnel. This "was" the one.

Good thing that I did find another way out. Good thing that there "is" another way out. No one else is ever going to find the Great Chamber, by this tunnel.

But, how will the GOLD FROG get out, now? He has been used to coming in through this tunnel. Ahah! He still does, it seems. Frog tracks, here, in this soft dirt. They go right up to the top of this cave-in and probably right over the top and down the other side of it. Yes. That's it. It's only a few inches deep, at the very top of the dirt pile. So, I "could" get out, through here - - - - if I had to.

O.K., back to the chamber. I'll continue on with tunnel entrance #6. It appears to be on a level floor design and goes about 40 yards, turns to the right and goes another 15 feet and - - - - another dead end, I'm into solid rock. No wonder, there are signs that they tried to go around the solid rock, first to the right, then to the left, but to no avail. On to entrance #7.

But right now, it's time to check the water level in the pool. Let's see how much it has - - - - hmmm?

It has only gone down an inch! That is all? How could that be? There must be almost as much new water coming into - - - - somehow, somewhere, - - - - as the siphon tube is taking out. This could take for ever!

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter six

Entrance #7 goes only 20 feet and turns right, as did the #6 tunnel, and it too, runs almost immediately into solid rock. Over to entrance #2. I want to take the backpack with extra batteries and bulbs as well as a rope and some small digging equipment. Here we are. This one should show me something. The very first one of these tunnels coming in from the outside could have been a "main" entrance coming in from the direction of the Potomac, southeast of the Great Chamber.

Yes, this tunnel does go upward gently, steadily. Now, it's leveling off and staying level, for a while. There are no linking tunnels, or intersecting tunnels. This one is definitely headed somewhere. At least, it seems like it would have, at some time in the past. I can tell the floor is dirt. However, it's packed down very hard from - - - heavy foot traffic, I'd guess.

I'm going to put my backpack down and take a rest for just a minute. Maybe, by the time I get back from looking over this tunnel, in an hour or so, that water level in the pool will have gone down by 2 feet or so. I hope so, or this could run into days or maybe a week of waiting. In that case, I would have to go back and refresh my supplies and return from the surface later.

Is that it, perhaps? The light, I mean. Is that the reason why I can't see it? Because, the timing of it isn't perfect, right now? Maybe. So, what do I do next? Drain all that water from the pool? Clear away all loose sand from the floor in the Great Chamber, to reveal a trap door beneath? What?

The two-foot high wall, forming the front of that pool, is significant somehow. I would just bet on it. But, how? Why? For what? Why would someone need any extra height of the water level in that pool and go to all that trouble to build it up two extra feet?

Any elaboration, such as that wall, is usually an ambiguous attempt to conceal something. For sure!

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter six

Is this real proof that some person, and not just the GOLD FROG, may have left something of great value, at one time, within these tunnels?

Enough rest. I'm ready. The more I move around, the better my thinking cap works. I can't have walked much more than 60 yards, so far. I'll get my backpack and continue - - - - southeast, - - - - which is right towards the Potomac. The tunnel must be about 30 feet below the river bottom, but rising steadily. It could come out together, with the river bottom. It's rising and rising, still rising.

I've come about three quarters of a mile, by now. The floor is wet. Now, - - - - it is all rock, smooth wet slate, sloping sharply down to my left. I'm going to set my pack down so that I can hold on better. The tunnel seems - - - - to open up. Now, as I look up at the ceiling, I can't even see it. It's dripping water everywhere, like a shower, almost. I don't think that I can go on much further. I - - - - Yaaaaa. Whoomph.

Oh damn! I slipped and fell over the edge of the trail, completely off the tunnel floor, and down here, to some kind of rocky ledge. There're just sheer rock walls, going straight up on all sides. But, these are not close enough to each other to "spiderwalk" between them. And I couldn't do it anyway. I'm hurt. Everything about me stings. I've got this ringing sound in my ears - - - - it won't go away. This is a deep pit. I'm trapped!

The flash is still in my hand. And it is "still" working. My backpack is clear up on the tunnel floor, maybe 24 feet up, less my 6-foot height and arm reach. My left arm is numb, - - - - hurts like Hell. My head is hurt. It's bleeding a little and both my knees are in pain, too. My palms sting, badly. I feel dizzy.

All I have is the flash, my compass and my knife. At least the water isn't coming down directly over me.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter six

Oh no! I've got no rope - - - no climbing pins or a hammer. Can't dig foot holds in this slate rock, with a knife. There is no way in which to get a start up, nothing to give me finger or toeholds. This grade of slate does have some cracks between the layers. It is a solid surface. But, it's very slippery from this damned mist in here. My pack must be right at the top of this part of the wall. What I need is a rope, so I can reach my backpack. It has everything that I need.

Then, I could use the climbing pins in it - - - to get out of here. There's even a small hammer, too. From the tip of my hand, "if" I can stand up, it could be 18 feet, plus maybe three feet more, to exactly the back side of the sloping tunnel floor. How can I even reach that far? All I've got is the knife - - - and the clothes on my back. The clothes on my back! Yes. That's "it!" I think so. Yes, twenty feet! I could, with a little luck, make it. Going to be tough. But, I have no choice. I'm getting some feeling back in my hands, and I'm not so dizzy, now.

It's going to be a piece of cake, really. Once I begin to think it through.

Next time, wear the damn rope over your shoulder.
(Rip) It's simpler! (Rip)

Where are you "now," Mr. Frog, when I need you?

(Rip, rip) All you'd have to do is nudge the old backpack down here, to me. (Rip) I'd be so grateful. (Rip, rip, rip)

There, naked as a new born baby - - - with just his shorts. I cut off both pants legs and then cut up each one, into eight strips. Tore up my shirt, shirt- sleeves, T-shirt, even my socks. Since, the knotting, or tying of knots would use up at least a third of the overall length of my materials, a simple cloth "rivet" made from a narrow strip of T-shirt, serves me well.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter six

Poked through two slits, an inch apart in each of the overlapped ends of two connected strips, it neatly creates a most formidable "rope," of cloth. Likewise, with their laces tied, my two shoes form the "weighted lasso" at the other end. It'll be plenty long.

What ever it takes. I can do it. I can't afford any failures. This has to work.

Suddenly, I realize how "chilled" I feel from the damp air and the shower activity above and with all my clothes in shreds. I've got to succeed! I've got to get out of here, soon. Even if I do lasso my backpack and pull it down here to me, I'm not positive if I can climb up these sheer walls, even with my climbing pins and toehold rings, I designed myself.

I'm hurt. I really just want to lie down - - - - for a little while. Maybe, I won't hurt so much in an hour from now. Or, maybe I'll feel even worse, get so stiff I can't move, or go into shock from exposure. I must get moving. Right now, now!

I'm beginning to stiffen up, already. I'm almost finished. Tie the shoe laces. Make a loop of the two shoes and tie their laces, on the end of the "rope."

If I can only hit right behind the pack, and just nudge it, it may fall over and roll right on down here to me. The thing should roll because the tunnel floor is sloped there.

How could I have been so stupid as to end up like this? Down here? All I was doing, damn it, - - - - I must stand up - - - - ohhh, that hurts, damn, damn it. Ohhh - - - -. I'm up - - - - almost, now. Getting there. There! I'm up. Oh, no. I forgot the rope!

It is still on the ground! I don't believe this! Just can't stoop over. I just can't do that, "again," - - - - standing up. No, not again.

THE GOLD FROG
Chapter six

"Here rope!" Come to Stevie. Jump!

Ahh, my belt. It's looped around my neck. Good. I'll undo it. There. Now, fish the shoe string, next to the shoe, with the buckle. Uhhhh. There! Gotcha. Now, - - - eeeeeeasy, easy. Got it! Ohhhh. I don't know if I can do this. Yes, I can. I've got to. Can do. Know I can, got to. Roll up the rope - - - and pretend that I - am - going - to - throw these shoes a hundred feet up - - - and that should make it. Have to make the first try count. Can't throw it more than once or twice, at the most. I'm getting a bit woosey. Hang tough. It's going to be alright.

Ready! No - - - no, wait. Not ready - - - . Come on. You can do it. Come on, now. O.K., here we go. Tired, very tired. Wake up! Wake up. "Shake it off." Ready, - - - ready. Throooooow!

Damn! I missed - - - the ledge above, and all. Way off. Bad shot. I can do better. Rope's still in one piece. Check it, now. It's O.K. Let's go again. O.K., this time I'm going to make it. I can do it. I "can" do it! All or nothing. This is it. Gotta make this one. Here we go. Last try. Gonna do it. Throw it up over that ledge, right up - - - there. Ready.

Deep breath - - - . Throooooow!

Yessss, it stayed. Did it catch, or is it loose? It's taught! It caught on something. Ohh, thank you, Lord. Thank you! O.K., rest a second, just a second.

It's the moment of truth. Eeeasy. Gently. Now, I think I've got it. It is moving, now! Just keep it taught! Come to Papa. That's it, right to the edge.

Ohhh, yes, I've got it. There. Easy does it. A wee bit more. Ahhhh? It's stuck. Gonna have to pull hard all at once. No, wait - - - what if this cloth rope breaks - - - uh, half way up?

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter six

Well, then, I will be out of luck, period. So, I won't jerk on it hard. Try rocking it a little. Pull taught, plus a little more, then let it go. Pull, let go. Do it again and again. Can't see too well.

It moved - - - - ahh, it fell - - - - right on my left shoulder. But, I have it! Here's my canteen. I need it. Take a drink. It's good. Save the rest.

After a half hour's rest in chilled air, the hard job of driving the pins and pulling myself up the face of the cliff, finally ended when I reached the top and rolled up onto the tunnel floor.

I had tied the good rope from the pack to my left ankle, with 30 feet of slack, and then, when I reached the tunnel floor again, I just pulled it up behind me. After resting for about 15 minutes, I went back toward the Great Chamber, where I had a complete change of my clothing in one of the two canvas bags. It is lucky I had brought extra clothes. Otherwise, I'd be naked.

As I make my way back toward the chamber, I began to feel a little more relieved, like a great burden is being lifted, and I know that I'm going to be alright. My knees still hurt, but nothing is broken, just some- what bruised. I'll live, if I don't catch my death of pneumonia from this fruitless effort.

Here's the Great Chamber at last. What a welcome sight. There is a warm blanket, here, in one of these canvas bags. It was for keeping warm when sleeping in here. It will come in handy, now. Right now, I could use a drink of canteen water. Then, I'll wash my cuts with pool water. Here are my dry clothes. Ahh, warm.

I've got to rest, now, just for a minute. Got to lie down and pull this blanket over - - - - . Sleepy, very sleepy. Warm, again. Hmmmm.

Uhmhmhmhmhm, I seem to be following the frog again.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter six

There he goes, away from me, and right into - - - a hole, right through that wall. I can barely squeeze through the hole. It can't be more than 5 or 6 inches wide. Tight squeeze! But, I can still see him going.

Now I see a faint greenish light ahead. It's not bright, just - - - - around this right corner and down a long hallway. There's no door, just an arch, almost 10 feet high and a foot wide, which is ornamented with white stone. The walls are black, but the floor is of dark green marble, with snow white flaw lines rippling throughout, creating a stark contrasting effect. This room is long and narrow. Can't see any of the ceiling overhead, just blackness. The source of that greenish light is indirect, unknown. There's merely this glow.

A big dark green curtain is hanging all along the wall on my right side, 40 feet of curtain. I have got to look. There goes that frog "again." He went right under the curtain. Let's see what's behind it. Ohhh!

Big Gold Frogs - - - - statues, approximately two and a half feet tall. Yes, they are! Uhmhm.

The greenish light is gone. Where am I - - - - ? Ohh, I must have fallen asleep. Been dreaming, again! In colors, too. Gold frogs, two and a half feet tall? What next? Hey, I forgot to check the pool - - - - to see how far - - - -. What time is it? It's 4:35 p.m. The light is fading a bit.

Let me see, now - - - -. Oh! That hurts! Yeow. Oow, oow, oow. Ooooooh my. Moving around really isn't good. I'm stiff. The water level is not - - - - down much more than about 20 inches. This siphoning tactic will take days. I need more tubing, better withdrawal.

But the way I feel, I'm not going anywhere to get more. Not right now, I'm not. I "can" see just a bit deeper towards the bottom, now. There's something in the water - - - - some kind of shelf or something.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter six

It's right on the back wall, almost three feet or so below the current water level. It blends right in. I might not have even noticed it. It looks like it is man-made. Yes, there are large smooth bolt heads, all around the edge. No visible design on it, or writing. It's about two feet by five feet, and it's attached to that back wall of the pool.

There's the GOLD FROG, below water. He's sitting right on the shelf. Now, he pivots around, and around again. It's like he's trying to tell me something. I have no idea what, though.

There he goes, swimming off of the shelf and down under it. This wouldn't be his resting place or nest, not totally under water. Besides, there is no "light" here. His nest must be in another chamber, possibly a much smaller one or one not accessible from here.

The water is still going down.

I'm going to have a drink, something good to eat, and then, I'm going to get some real sleep. The water level should be down quite far by tomorrow's first ray of light. I expect there will be a big change then.

After 40 minutes of stuffing myself, I have quit.

I have got this weird feeling that a pair of eyes - - - are watching me. I don't know what these eyes belong to, they're buming into my back. He is there. Something. I'm not alone, now.

Where's that piece of strap iron? Here it is. I am ready for anything. Just let him come. I'm ready. I'll keep the flash in my hand, tonight. What ever it is, if it comes, I want to see it.

You know, I just remembered - - - there's still one tunnel that I haven't checked out, yet. But, I am certainly going to keep my rope on me and the backpack in my hand at least.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter six

I don't want to have any more of these near death surprises. From now on, I want to be in complete control.

The light is down to just a glow, now. I heard a "wee splash." Looking around, over at the pool, I can see that it is just the frog, having a swim. I wonder what he eats? Something from the surface, no doubt.

I guess, I'll sleep right here by entrance #8 and the pool. Oow, ahh. Hurts to kneel. Am very sleepy.

I am walking down railroad tracks, next to one of the rails. It's dark and now I can hear a train chugging. It's coming - - - closer and closer. I've got to get off the tracks. But, I can't. My legs - - - can't move my legs!

Something heavy is rolling over my legs.

Ohh, - - - dreaming again, I hope? Oow, oh, my knees still ache. Wait. I really can't move my legs. Something's moving - - - ? It's really big!

Flashlight! Turn it on, quick. I feel something heavy laying on my legs - - - now it's moving again!

It looks like a big truck tire tread, no - - - , it's a huge "SNAKE." It's sliding right over my legs. It's going to the pool. How did it miss me? Or isn't it hungry, now?

It is huge - - - 30 to 35 feet long, at least.

I can just now see the tip of his tail, and it is coming out of entrance #8. Number 8? There, he's off of me. I can move again!

He is curling up, over by the pool. His tail has little feet? One on each side. I don't believe this. It must be a Boa constrictor. No! It's too large.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter six

A Boa is only 10 feet long. This one's closer to 40 feet long. And the "size" of this one! At least a foot in diameter, at over half his entire body length.

This has to be an Anaconda, or something.

But, they are native to South America. So, where did he come from, around here? Did he get away from a zoo or some research lab?

I felt that a pair of eyes were watching me, much earlier. I just has no idea, or I would not have ever gone to sleep - - - knowing "he" was here, too.

So, what could he want? Not me, quite obviously, since they don't normally attack a human. They aren't poisonous, just huge, and they crush their victims, by curling around them. They have eyes that adapt easily to night hunting and little heat-sensitive organs near its mouth, enabling it to locate any warm-blooded prey in complete darkness - - - like in tunnels. Hmmmmm?

There's the GOLD FROG, on the ledge, at the right hand side of the pool. The snake sees him.

No! He can't have him. No. Get away! Get away from him. I'll hit him with this piece of strap iron. "Whack! Whack!"

Ohh, he doesn't like that. Now, he's coming back towards me. That's okay. I can move much faster than he can. I'm more scared! Here snakey - - - snakey. Go, little frog, go! I'll get him to follow me out of here. I may not be first on his lunch list, but I can sure make him mad as Hell and taunt him into following me and get him to leave, - - - at least, out of this chamber. This cave just isn't big enough for the both of us, and I'm not leavin' - - - just, yet. Now, he couldn't have been here all this time or we would have "bumped" into each other before this. I think I would definitely have remembered such a chance encounter.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter six

He does seem to be after the GOLD FROG, as though he knew exactly where to find him. But the frog would make such a tiny little morsel. Unless, - - - there is some kind of "vibes" transmitted by these two as to the pecking order for being the "King of the Mountain" in here.

He's moving, now - - - . Slowly. Over towards entrance #1. And, now, he is going into #2. Yes! He is. I don't believe this. He's going right over into tunnel #2, where I fell into the slate pit. But, that isn't where he came from, just now. No, he came right in - - - through tunnel #8. That is how he happened to slide right over my legs.

There he goes. He's gone, now. Whew! At last.

I'm wide awake, now. And, I don't feel like I'll be going back to sleep again, any time soon. So, good night, Mr. Snake. And, good riddance. Oh, I hurt all over, but it is good to be alive and well. Thank you, Lord.

Now, - - - just where the Hell did he come from up in tunnel #8? I thought I knew all of that tunnel, pretty well, clear to the end. Maybe, this one does live down here. He could have come anywhere from around the waterfall. The Map room may be "his" nest.

Maybe the snake was just "out" when I happened by and blundered in on that hidden Map room. Has he been following me from there, ever since? Not likely. As, he would have lost me at the deep cone shaped chamber, or at least at the stone bridge, the 65-foot drop down to the streambed below would leave no trace. He would not have known that I had gone down that knotted rope.

Even if he had gotten my scent, he could not have followed me, not after I entered the water. How could he? No. Of course not. And, he didn't. Which means I was probably right the first time about the falls.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter

SEVEN

"Exploring"

So eventually, I guess he would come down to this chamber by tunnel #8. But, why did he - - - he went right "over" me, towards the pool. He should not have needed to come down here for a drink. He has water of his own, up at the waterfall.

Surely, the source didn't dry up. Not likely.

I don't suppose that lowering of the pool's water level, somehow, brought him down to see what was going on? I really don't know. I hope that he has made his one "annual" visit, though.

I wonder if there are more? They have from 20 to 40 young, each year. There could be hundreds of them, maybe. I doubt that. I should have run across one of them before this. Well, I'll just take a look around. No trace of another snake up tunnel #8. He had to see me or realize I was there, heat seeking senses and all that. But, he didn't seem to care. I'm sure glad for that. No frog in sight. And, the snake is gone.

Just in case he comes back here tonight, in order to return back up tunnel #8, I am going to "rest" over here at entrance #4, since it only goes into #3.

And, I'll be out of the traffic pattern.

All this excitement over a "little" snakey.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter seven

It's just 6:45 a.m. I'm going back to sleep. It is way too early to be getting up. I am bushed.

There's nothing to worry about, now. But, I will keep my piece of strap iron close by. Good night, Mr. Frog, wherever you are. See you tomorrow, I hope.

Can't sleep, or I keep waking up every 20 minutes or so. This is the fifth time. Surely, the hour must be early morning. Let's see. It's uh, 8:30 a.m. The chamber is still dark. Here is my flash. Take a look around. It's O.K. There isn't a snake in sight. I'm alone, still. I'll try to doze off again.

Wham, wham! What was that? I thought I felt the ground shake and I heard a loud noise. I think I did. I was just dozing off and I can't be sure. Certainly, I would not have imagined it. And, that did seem like it could have been a Metrorail collision. They do run the trains this early. But, did I really - - - hear anything, at all? I'd swear I heard a very heavy thud or crashing sound. It was not right here, but awfully close by, very close.

By looking around, everything here in the chamber seems to be O.K. I can't find anything different.

I must be imagining things. I'll just go back to sleep, and we'll see in the morning, when the light is much better.

Hey, rise 'n' shine. It's morning. I slept good - - - finally. Now, the light is good. Let me see, what the Hell happened last night. Only one snake rut in the dry sand, very clearly. The snake did not come back this way after all. He must know another way out or is still down tunnel #2. Hopefully, he is gone for good. It's 11:00 a.m. and the overhead light is again growing stronger by the minute.

It's time to get started with priorities.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter seven

First, I want to check on the pool's water level. O.K.! It's way down - - - - 4 feet, at least. Wooah. The shelf has dropped down flat against the back wall.

Something's not right here. I sense a change has occurred here, somehow. Something's wrong. But what?

Hope the frog is alright. In the mean time, I am going to have fruitcake and apple juice for breakfast. This may be the last time I get to eat, for some time.

Ten minutes later, I'm on my way with my backpack and gear, to investigate the one last tunnel that I've yet to explore, the left fork of tunnel #1. So, going on through the entrance of #1, down the tunnel - - - - and, what the - - - - ? Here is a "gate!" The tunnel is completely blocked by a gate.

I'm only 25 feet into this tunnel and here it is. I couldn't see it from in the chamber, even with shaft light. It would be impossible to squeeze through. It has little openings that are only 8 inches square, and they're formed by a series of criss-cross "strap iron" strips, systematically bolted around the edges and all throughout the middle area. Here's a heavy wood frame around the edge with a single cross member. The total size of this "gate" is bigger than the tunnel, at this point. This doesn't exactly make my day.

This seems totally out of place. Who would rig a thing like this, such an elaborate trap? It certainly was not the GOLD FROG! Which means another time frame definitely was involved, and another "proprietor" used these tunnels to secure the secrets of their trade.

It is obviously meant to keep some intruder "in." I must have passed a security threshold, or gotten too close to someone's secret. "It's strap iron."

In fact, the overall structure resembles a "hatch cover" from those early 18th Century sailing ships.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter seven

Yes, I've seen structures just like these in some pictures of old sailing vessels. Such hatches usually were raised a foot or so off the deck surface and were located along the center line of the deck, to keep any water that came crashing across the deck, during rough seas, from going into them. This type has no lip, and therefore, it would have set down flush inside, at the top of the hatch. This one kept people out, but would let fresh air into the cargo holding area, below deck.

This exact type may have come from about the 1714 to 1734 period of ships with sails. "Pirate ships!"

This doesn't make sense. Why should an old hatch cover suddenly block off this tunnel? Or, - - - are the other tunnels blocked, also? Even so, why so damn suddenly? This must be what I heard "crashing" in the night. But, I wasn't even doing anything then.

Could I have caused this event? How could I? It occurred while I was asleep, more or less.

I can't figure this one. So, I better check this out. Check the other tunnels and see if a hatch cover is blocking each of them.

I doubt if #3 and #4 would have any. Let me see, #2 tunnel is closed off the exact same way. No way to squeeze through, not even on the sides.

This is really strange. What typical pirate ship would have extra hatch covers? Unless, - - - they'd taken them from other ships that they pillaged at sea. The real question is, why? What were they protecting?

Pirates treasure!

Would they actually leave something of such great value, for which they risked their lives, in an "open" cave like this? There must have been a main entrance. It would have been "hidden" from view in a normal way.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter seven

But how could a pirate "Captain" be sure that one of his crew wouldn't jump ship and steal away while in port? Where, that crew member could find someone else with a ship and they could come back for the treasure, together and find this cave and the treasure, and they could take it themselves.

Maybe, pirates brought the original Anaconda from South America and left it here to protect their hidden treasure. And, as superstitious and uneducated as the rogue sailors were then, the Captain could likely have told them that any sort of evil curses inhabited these caves, whose reentry was forbidden to all, at the cost of their very lives.

I was right, - - - this tunnel from entrance #3 goes - - - and comes out again, yeah, at entrance #4 without any gate. On to tunnel #5. It may not have a gate, either.

On the other hand, did this "Captain" ever return to get his loot? Or, did sweet destiny in the form of a hangman's noose, or death in battle or an unforeseen misfortune such as being imprisoned, keep him away and from returning in a timely manner, to lay claim to his prize, while he still had his own ship? It's entirely possible that destiny intervened, leaving all his loot still here in the bosom of these tunnels.

Tunnel #5 should have a gate, too, only if it was a way out, then. Here's the cave-in. No gate.

If there had been a gate in this tunnel, it would have been closer to the Great Chamber. That means the one who rigged these gates to fall, knew that this one had no way out. Then why does this tunnel have a man-made deep pit? Or, maybe that pit at the far end near the Metrorail station was actually meant to trap those intruders who tried to find another way out, after the gates fell. I remember that I couldn't see the bottom with just the small flashlight I had with me that day.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter seven

Of course, several men trapped in there together, could stand on the shoulders of the others and get out eventually.

This must have been a dead end tunnel until those Metro people burrowed through. Who ever filled in all those large granite boulders must not have realized an exit existed in the small chamber, when they found it. Whereas, I had the GOLD FROG to show me that there was a way out.

Skipping dead end tunnels #6 and #7, in tunnel #8 I can see the hatch cover immediately, only 20 feet or so, back inside. All exit tunnels are blocked, except #5 which I might still be able to get out - - - if I can still get back out through those granite boulders, the reverse way that I came in. I don't know. I have not had to try it, yet. If I had to, I probably could make it. But, I'd rather not - - - "have to." They might shift while I'm between them.

I'm just about trapped. Almost. But, not quite.

I've got to check this out closely. Strange, how these hatch covers fell. This one over here in tunnel #1 doesn't seem to have fallen straight down. And, it is not level at the bottom, either. This one seems to have fallen from the left side of the tunnel wall. It is as though the hatch cover was poised up on a corner and was held perfectly balanced by "something," and it fell whenever that perfect balance was altered. If it did fall from left to right, there's a chance that the designer of it did not foresee any rock debris falling into the slot where the hatch cover was setting before it fell. Or, maybe, the debris didn't fall in as much as it should have.

In that case, all I have to do is get some mortal leverage on this piece of strap iron and lift it.

Ahhhhh! No such luck.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter seven

This thing must weigh at least 450 pounds. Uhhh! It doesn't budge, not even an inch. Small debris must have filled in tight. It's wedged in here real tight. I can't spread the straps, too strong. They are about three eighths of an inch thick by 5 inches wide, each. Well, I'll have to think on this. But, there is bound to be a way. Where there's a will, there's a way.

I could sure use a car jack right about now. I'd also need a very solid base, to put it on. Don't have - - - - wait, that's it. Base. Try and dig out under the bottom.

I can use my piece of strap iron to dig. Yes. I am starting to get - - - - no. It's rock, solid rock. Not just pieces of rock, but solid rock, all along the gate, all the way across the tunnel floor. Both these left and right side walls have only large rocks, also. The left side of the hatch cover seems to extend quite far back to the left. There's just no easy answer.

Now the ceiling of this tunnel is almost all rock - - - - that's another story. It's much harder for me to reach, but it already has the defect of the slot in it, that the hatch cover fell down through. And right at it's center, there is even a two-inch space between the top of the gate and the ceiling.

At first, I'll have to stand on the gate in order to reach up to the ceiling. But, as I dig out dirt or rock from the ceiling, it may give me something else I can stand on, so that I can use two hands to dig.

Back to what happened to make these gates fall to this position, all at once, so suddenly, what could've happened to trigger them to fall? What's so different right now, that wasn't this way 270 years ago, or even yesterday? I don't see it.

Ahah! Just one thing that I can think of - - - - the current water level in the pool. That shelf fell.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter seven

That shelf must've breached a security trip latch of trip wire of some kind. Perhaps, I will never know the whole truth. Is it absolutely necessary? No. No it isn't. Wouldn't change a thing.

I know that "if" there was a hidden treasure here somewhere, and if there still is, then I will find it, period. That's for certain.

This I know, 'cause the GOLD FROG Riddle said so.

Now, I would judge that the "draft" of a pirate's ship would have permitted it to sail them right up the Potomac River, if the river entertained relatively the same banks and water volume then, as now. Given that, they only had to come as far up river as where we find the present Jefferson Memorial.

And, if any intruders had come 270 years ago, the culprits would still be here, and the gates would have been already down. Unless, they couldn't figure out a need, or how, to lower the water level. I did not and still certainly don't fully understand the exact why's or how of that point.

Pirate justice would have been permanent. But, I will have to say that in my case, there's not going to be anyone coming back to find me. I will have to find my own way out of this.

And, now that I think of it, I've got the digging tools in my backpack that can help do this little task very nicely. There's a brick hammer, a small pick for the rocks, and a long crowbar that will come in handy, too. That'll be a lot better than trying to do it all with just my piece of strap iron.

If I can just reach this ceiling, there's a small rock sticking down. Take a little more dirt away from around the back side and - - - there, it should come - - - little more and, uh, it's coming. Look out!

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter seven

Nice to see gravity still working. I'm beginning to get a foot hold in this one place. This "is" going to work, just fine.

On the bright side, one knows that history leaned toward supporting the assertion that very few pirates, privateers, or buccaneers ever had their treasures dug up. Which points out two more possibilities. One, is that pirates were highly skilled at the art of hiding, especially their valuables. Two, is that those who've actually found such treasure, would not be dumb enough to tell anyone else. So, no one else would ever know.

Keep on digging. This rock is concentrated here, but it is coming out in small pieces. I guess, anyone else who might have gotten caught in here wasn't quite supposed to have all these tools.

It's been about two hours now that I've been digging here. I'm covered with dirt, - - - in my eyes, my ears, my hair, and down my back. What a mess!

There, that should be big enough. If I can't get through that hole, I'd better start dieting. And yet, the bigger the opening got, the easier it was to widen it. I can even get my backpack through, separately.

I need to clean up, shake off my clothes and hey, I should check the water level in the pool. The drain tube wasn't touched by the fallen hatch cover. Ooops. It's empty! But I never noticed it wasn't flowing. I wonder what could be wrong?

Quick, check the pool.

The water level hasn't changed a bit since I last looked at it. It is still at the same point, right at the middle of the two-foot depth of the shelf. But, I can't see why the water completely stopped draining.

It shouldn't have lost it's suction force.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter seven

The submerged end of the siphon tube should still be on the bottom. I can not see it, but I can pull it up very slowly, - - - - slowly. There, finally. Yes, it would have been there. So, what's up? Only a hole of some kind in the tube or - - - - . Wait. It would have to be up here near the lip of the pool.

Here it is. Five tiny holes, but enough to break the suction. At this critical elevation of the siphon tube, that's all it took. Looks to me a lot like frog bites. That Anaconda's teeth would have shredded this tubing. No. This is the work of the GOLD FROG. I'll bet. But, why?

There he is, down in the water. Now, he's on the shelf. Now, he just jumped clear up to the ledge over to the right side of the pool. He's sticking his chin up in the air at me. It's almost as though - - - - he were saying: "I told you so."

What did I do, anyway? Lowering the water was to be my brain child. But, it has backfired, somehow. I guess that's what he is referring to. Well, how did I know? Better yet, how did "he" know?

But, he "does" know! Doesn't he? So, what is it he knows? What could be the hidden relevance of these hatch covers? At least I know they exist, now.

The prize could be bigger than I first thought.

The lettered copper coins are in no way a part of the GOLD FROG Riddle, 'cause they are merely 218 years old. No, it seems several different time periods have seen visitors come to these tunnels.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter

E I G H T

Diggin' In

First, some of these tunnels could have developed as natural old water channels, cutting deeply into the earth. Then, men came of one period or another. They came and dug more tunnels, the curving ramp-like ones, especially. That accounts for there being more than a single entrance. Sailors may have been trying to find drinkable water and when tracing "wet spots" or spring water, may have just kept digging and accidentally hit one of these tunnels and then found the Great Chamber.

Thereupon, that Captain might have thought: "What better place to hide something?"

Who knows? The first may well have been pirates, during the early 1700's, or even earlier.

Then, about 140 years or so later, there were the brash Union soldiers who left their two sleeve buttons behind them, as evidence of their presence here during the historic Civil War period. Oh, someone else could have dropped them. But, I doubt that. And strangely, they were found in the proximity of the lettered coins of Colonial Virginia, the copper Halfpennies. There's a definite tie-in there. A second riddle for sure.

But, there's no clear indication in these tunnels that the Confederate troops ever succeeded in locating this Union hiding place. Yet, history "reflects" them as the more crafty and resourceful of the two armies.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter eight

The Confederacy should never, ever have lost that war, for all their valor and courage. But, no matter how gallant, they just were not properly prepared, nor were they equal to developing the tremendous resources of the bloody Yankees. There was a war that was never really ended. It had just faded out for all the wrong reasons. Slavery wasn't the question, on either side.

I'll settle with you later, Mr. Frog. Right now, I've got to trace the left fork. But, there is no use in taking all my stuff over to the other side of hatch cover #1. I may not even go back out through that old crypt. I don't know about that, yet. Haven't crossed that bridge. We'll see.

Here, push the backpack through, the rope, and my canteen and here's the flashlight and compass. There! I'm over and through. Easy. Now, it's time I put new batteries and bulb in the flash, as I could be in this darkness for several hours, depending, on whatever I'm able to find. Here is the small left fork tunnel, off of #1. My first compass reading, upon entering, is at 135 degrees/due SE. The floor is soft dirt and rather rutted. Its three-foot wide opening has just a meager five-foot high ceiling. This is a tight fit, with all this gear. There's just enough room in here for me to turn around, not a bit more. I'd sure hate to meet up with that Anaconda in here. All this time, the tunnel floor has been rising, rather steadily, at about an 8- degree slope. And it definitely seems like a man-made tunnel, narrow and ramp-like.

After traveling not more than 30 yards, it is now turning to the left, on a heading of 90 degrees or due East. It is still rising. These tunnels appear to be navigational headings, but how could any sailor, while he's underground? No way. It is now beginning to smell a bit damp, and the tunnel is getting wider, and now it's just about five feet across. Hmmm? There is another fork, here, going off to the left and seems to continue to rise, but this one going East looks level.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter eight

Which one should I take first? Take on the level one, East. It continues on. Going another 200 yards, and I can hear - - - a lot of dripping water. Oops! Good thing I was being "extra" careful.

Trail ends here! The tunnel floor is "gone." It just drops off into total darkness, just a big 40-foot wide hole. I can see a black pool of water, far below me. The ceiling here is slate, and it slopes downward and away from me. This looks much like the upper part of the wet slate area that terminated tunnel #2. Must have been a tremendous cave-in here a long time ago, I would suspect. Wonder what's directly above me, up on the surface? Whatever it is, it could drop "right out of sight." In fact, I see something gray, overhead.

It looks like - - - the gray concrete corner of a building's foundation, right across from me, just 25 feet to my right. How little do they know!

It's time to go back, slowly and carefully. I do not want to miss any fork tunnel, in this darkness. I should be about one fourth of the way back by now. In an earlier period, this level tunnel could have been a replacement tunnel for #2. That one may have caved-in and this one was developed later. And then, even this one gave way in the same area. Wooosh! Caves created at different time periods may mean different visitors.

What a cave-in. I'd suspect that the water table adjacent to the Potomac and the "destructive agents" of time made that big hole.

How did the Yankees get in here - - - through a crevice in the area down by the river, or maybe, where the Lincoln Memorial is now? Maybe. The Union troops patrolled the Potomac, and they may have found a small cave or entrance there. But, they would have meant to cover that up when they departed, to conceal it.

So, - - - there would not have been any trace.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter eight

I'm almost back to that point where the fork went off and kept rising. Just a little further.

So, this tunnel would seem to date far back, much earlier than the Civil War era.

Here it is. I'll go right up. And, taking a new compass reading - - - it is curving to the left, and now it's straightening out at - - - 300 degrees/WNW. I must be going right towards or even over part of the Great Chamber area, or very close, depending how far I go. Uh, oh. I spoke too soon. This comes to a small chamber of about 10 feet in width, near its end, then, the tunnel starts again at a five-foot width, but then terminates just ahead. This doesn't make sense.

I just can not believe that this is all there is. Oh, I need a good rest. Need a drink, too. I'll just sit down right here, over in the corner, on this round three-foot high boulder. This must be the SW corner.

I must be closer to 40 feet higher than the floor of the Great Chamber. It had 65-foot high ceilings.

So, I would have to be off to one side, but still very close to it.

Wait a minute. Since when did they start putting in a resting place, or furniture in tunnels? What was I thinking about? This boulder - - - doesn't fit in here. It must have been brought up from the streambed down below. It is quite round, almost smooth and very difficult to get a good hold on, to move it. So, what is it doing in here? Why would anyone go to all that trouble? Unless, it is here to - - - hide something or cover up something, like a pirate's treasure chest. I want to see if I can move it. Uh. No way!

Now, wait a minute. Just remember, where there's a will, there's a way. So, think of a way. Something else I found out of place was my piece of strap iron.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter eight

That piece of strap iron - - - was deliberately hidden under that loose sand on the floor of the Great Chamber. It must have been hidden on purpose. And, I found it over to one side and near entrance #8 and the pool, right where someone could have found it "again," very easily if they had left it there, initially - - - and intentionally. It could be a key that someone did not want to have to carry around with them. And, that is why they buried it, so they could be sure it would always be here, where it is needed.

Now, I have the "key." What do I do with it?

It should have been intended to open some "lock," upon the Captain's return.

And, when you consider that this boulder has been here for well over 250 years, maybe, it is bound to be set in place and not easy to unset. I'll just take my piece of strap iron and dig out all the way around the base until I find - - - this. Just what I'm looking for! Here is a crevice near the backside. Slip it in and pry. Nothing! Again. Nothing. So, I'll rock it back and forth. Stomp on it from the side. Now, from the other side.

It moved! Keep going. It moved again. It seems to be a sphere, like a giant bowling ball without it's thumb and finger holes. Here, pry it up from the back once more, hard as I can. There! Keep it coming. It weighs a ton. Don't let it slip back. Hold on to it. Hold on. There, it's off the hole.

Ahah! What is it? There's nothing there. There is no treasure. But, wait - - - turn off the flash. There! There's light, just a soft glow. It's so much easier to see, now. Let's check this out. Flash back on, I can see what now appears to be a small four-foot square room directly below. It is empty, except for a small grappling hook. The hole covered by the boulder is only 18 inches across. I can barely squeeze myself down through it. There! I'm in.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter eight

The grappling hook has had a rope tied to it, but that has decayed, now. Wonder what it was for - - - in here? I wonder if it's a clue of some kind, to the whereabouts of the "light" that I've been looking for, in the GOLD FROG Riddle? This is a very strange place to find something like this.

But, this hook also helps to confirm any previous suspicions of the presence of pirates in the tunnels.

Now, turn the flash off. The glow is stronger.

Over here, to the front side of the room, there's a kind of a crawl space or pipe-like connecting tunnel that's very small in diameter. It exits the room on a compass heading of 270 degrees/ due West, going to the source of the light. Only a small boy or a wee monkey could crawl through there. I could almost make it. I would take up the entire 18-inch diameter. And, it is at least 20 feet long. Goes to another room?

There's no telling where that snake is right now, but it would be just like him, to come slithering down this hole behind me, if just for curiosity's sake. I know - - - a snake can't resist going down a hole. It is big enough, too. Oh, he could find it easily. The soft glow of light could attract him. I'd better take my backpack and stuff it in the hole, to block out the light. But, what about fresh air? I have to breathe. There's no telling if there is any other air source on the other end of this pipe-like tunnel.

Need my flash on, again.

The "pipe" curves slightly to the right. The bit of an opening that I can see, looks to be just about a four-inch wide slit, from here. But, once I'm in this pipe, I'll be able to see out the other end better. I just want to go only far enough to see what is at that other end. I want to see what I'm getting into, here. It seems to get just a tiny bit smaller at the middle.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter eight

So the hole overhead will be left open for an air supply. I'll wedge my small pick into it, and - - - there! It's stuck, but good. That snake won't get in through here. I hope. There just isn't room for both of us down here.

Now, what am I going to do with a grappling hook? What's it for? I'll have to think about this. In the mean time, how much of this stuff should I try to take with me? I should probably try to take all of it with me, later. As in the slate pit, tie one end of a rope to the backpack and then tie the other to my left foot or ankle, with a lot of slack. And that means I'll be going through "headfirst."

Ohhh, make up your mind. Well, I just don't like either choice. I don't like tiny, tight places. And, the more I think about this, the better the reason why I should go feetfirst. Well, face it. The real issue is not one of "approach," but really - - - uhhmm, in which of the two positions would I "rather be" - - - if - - - in case I, - - - I get stuck and I want to come back. I know, I am stalling. Both approaches have their own problems.

Feetfirst, I could not see where I would be going or how much I still had to go. Headfirst, I could not back up, at all, to get unstuck. No "good" choices.

Now, there won't be any "stopping" in the middle. It's just 20 feet to the other end. So, 20 feet is 20 feet. But, the real problem is that my body bulk will take up all the free space in the pipe, not leaving an inch to spare. Tight? Yes! Too tight. If it was 25 feet, I wouldn't do it. But, 20 feet, it begs for you to try. Hmmmm?

I don't like this at all. I have a bad feeling. But, for now, I'm going in headfirst.

This business must be decided quickly, now.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter eight

Oh, this isn't going to work. I'll have to be in on my side the whole time, and I'll have to put my arm up, my right arm, in front of me, while I keep my left arm down along my side, all in order to get both of my shoulders inside. Here goes. It's going to be tight. It's awfully tight. Can't do this! What, no guts? I must do this. Try it again. Now, before you think on it too much. Alright, I'm in. Relax! I'm only in up to my knees, so far. And now, I can see a little more light. Just a little bit further. Yes, now, I do see a brighter light, off to the right.

I've seen enough. That's enough for now. Got to get out of here. Okay, go ahead and back out. Relax! Slowly now, very slowly. I'm getting there. Can just relax, wiggle, wiggle. Oh, I've backed into something solid, but, I'm not all the way out, yet. Don't panic. It's just the dirt wall of the small four-foot square room. I'm too stiff. So relax! Bend at the knees a little. Use your left hand to help work yourself free of here. I can't breathe. Need air. Must get out, now. Can't back out fast enough. Try, try. I'm out! At last!

That's it! There "is" a bright light in the next room, beyond the other end of this pipe. This is what I've been looking for. I wonder if there is an easier way to get into it? And, if that light is in the room of the GOLD FROG's "nest," then he must have a private entrance, his own way of getting in there. He sure as Hell hasn't been coming through this way.

If there is another access route, why should this old grappling hook have been left in here? It appears that whoever did come this way the last time must have left this hook for their next visit. Seems like one's success is only accomplished by hard work and taking a great risk. Up until now, I had not considered taking any "great risks." The fall into the slate pit was my only exception. It was an accident. This pipe detour is a deliberate act. A mistake? This is desperation, forced by an obsession. The challenge is genuine.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter eight

My prize, however, is not totally defined, and it is most certainly not assured to even be there, still. But, I will "call" the hand. Who else could have got-ten here - - - - before me? Not a sane man.

Just for the Hell of it, let me use the flash and see if there is anything marked on the walls. Yes, on this wall, above the pipe there is an "X" with - - - - a face above it? SKULL AND CROSS BONES! That is just terrific. Just what I needed. The ole pirates "death threat," ploy. Ploy? Hmmmmm. Perhaps, this is meant as a last ditch attempt to stall any possible unwanted intruder. Which means - - - - ?

This could be an honest warning of what might lie ahead for some trespasser. Or, it's a fake. An empty threat. I must be getting closer than I thought. So, maybe, this pipe is it. One last obstacle to overcome and I'm home free. Hmmmm. I imagine that more likely is the possibility that this is one last trap. It's a bit small. If I were just smaller - - - - . Baaah!

Suppose I do get all the way through it and there isn't any other way out. Then what? I can tell what, exactly. I would have to try and make it back through the pipe - - - - a second time. So, then I'd be stuck in there with only water and no food. I didn't expect to be gone more than a couple hours.

I didn't know I might be delayed. I didn't bring anything except an apple. Wasn't planning on staying. I was just going to explore a little and see what went on, up this way, not spend the night. I certainly had not planned to go crawling around on my stomach in any pipe, not much bigger than my shoulders. Of course, I could go back, now, for food and rest, but I'd loose a lot of valuable time, daylight time, that is necessary to locate the "light" properly.

I would have to wait another day and hope that it was a sunny one on the surface.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter eight

A three-day rain system would mean that I'd loose three more days. And, I can't. No way! This is it.

It could take 45 minutes, even an hour, to wiggle my way through the entire 20 feet, maybe 22, of narrow little pipe. I might do it once - - - - but never two - - - - . Never! I just couldn't do it twice. That, would do something to me, mentally. Maybe, I couldn't even make it once. I don't know right now. I need to think a little more about this and not rush into this.

Meanwhile, I'm going to try to dig out the pipe's interior, at this end and try to make it larger. I'll have to use the brick hammer and the crowbar to dig in with, 'cause the pick has to stay where it is, just to keep the snake out.

What was that? I thought I heard something, like a rushing or sliding sound, like a big - - - - snake would make. Could he have climbed out of tunnel #2, below? He possibly could have extended himself up to 25 feet. But, he couldn't have come the other way, through the Great Chamber and back up tunnel #1. That snake couldn't get himself through that hatch cover at the entrance of tunnel #2. Then, he would have had to find another way up here. There it is, again! I know I heard it that time. Something "is" up above, in the tunnel, and it is moving around up there where the big three-foot high boulder sits. I don't suppose that he would try to put that sphere back over the hole again?

There, I can see him. It "is" the big snake. He has found me either with his heat sensors or he became curious when he caught sight of this glow of light. I never thought that the Anaconda might see the light up from under the boulder, once I moved it. Whatever! I can't go back out that way, now. Maybe later, when he leaves. But for now, he definitely doesn't approve of my presence, in a major way.

I've got to start digging this pipe out larger.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter

NINE

Where There's A Will

This could solve all of my problems. Great idea! Now what could go wrong? The light could go dark from clouds?

At first, the diggin' is going fine, except there is too much dust down here. And, the noise of digging is upsetting that snake for some reason. I'll have to stop anyway. The snake is covering the hole above and is cutting off my air supply! I must make him move.

I've got a cigarette lighter that I brought along from my last trip to the surface, to check for drafts. I should have used this earlier. First, I want to try it on our friend, here. I can see his little claw, or whatever, near his tail. What a weird thing.

Have a hot foot, snakey, but most of all you will get off the hole. It works. And a good thing, before the air gets too thin to support a flame. Now, I will poke him with the crowbar. Ahh, he doesn't like that, either. There, he's moving around up there, now.

Maybe he's leaving. No. I still hear him. He's curling all around the boulder. But, why? Now, he is moving it. Oh, no. I don't believe this - - - . He is actually sliding the boulder back - - - back over the hole. Quick, I'll put the piece of strap iron in, across the top of this pick handle. Then, cut a piece of rope and tie the two together, to hold the boulder.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter nine

There, at last, that should keep the boulder from shutting off my air supply from above, completely. It won't sit down in this hole totally, as it did before.

And now, back to my diggin'. I'll have to use my large screwdriver and my crowbar. The brick hammer is quite effective so far, in removing the dirt and rock. But, I begin to see two new problems.

First, the newly removed dirt and rock is falling to the floor of this already very small room. It's in loose form, and it takes up more room. It won't work, ultimately. Not as long as the hole above is covered, and I can't throw out any dirt, up there. Maybe, I'll be able to, later. Second, as I dig further back into the pipe, I can see that I soon won't have enough room to swing the brick hammer. And now, a "third" problem - - - I've hit solid rock! There's absolutely not a way of going around it. This stuff is "solid."

Oh, no. I don't need this. All the farther I've gotten is just two feet into the pipe opening. That's it. That's all I can do in this respect. For now, it is back to sweating out the ole pipe. Just when I was beginning to feel some relief and seem to be closer to finding the light and the GOLD FROG's nest, so many of my options seem to be going all wrong.

The snake is no threat, not really. However, his presence is sure complicating things down here for me, unnecessarily. I just don't need his intrusion. Yes, he and I are going to mix, yet. I can feel it coming. But, right now, I can't allow him to distract me, away from my first priority: finding the "light."

Suddenly, I feel caught up in harsh circumstances created by someone else, who dared the whole world not to take what was his. I am being dictated to by some- one else's will. And, while I don't like it, this has become part of the rules of the game. Destiny has one set of rules for all. Yes, this game is real.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter nine

It could easily become a matter of life or death. I'm down here all alone, all on my own. There's not a soul that can help me, now. I'm on my own. That "is" exactly the way I'd wanted it, as long as I had plenty of - - - "room" to move around. This is just a very pressure driven situation. Someone planned it - - - this way. I need to break the mold and stop reacting.

Start anticipating for a change. I must assume I am on the right track. This "is" the way to the nest.

The grappling hook - - - now I think I know how it might have been used. It could have been a smaller man or boy that accompanied the Captain - - - and it took the both of them to manage to get in, and out, of here alive. It was probably the cabin boy. But, only the boy came this far, down through the small hole the boulder was sitting in. The Captain had to stay above 'cause he was too big. Then, the small boy did all of the work, going feetfirst. Sure.

Once this boy was out the other end of this pipe, with a rope tied to his "wrist," he would pull himself back into this small room, using the grappling hook on this end. Now, I can't do that - - - just that same way, because I have widened and sloped this end of the pipe. There's nothing here, any longer, to which I can "fasten" the hook. Just great! Way to go.

Of course, another possibility would be to use my piece of strap iron across this end of the pipe, tying the hook to it, so they wouldn't fall apart. It would be long enough to hold the hook just fine. But first, I'd have to very quietly exchange the crowbar with the piece of strap iron, in order to keep the boulder from completely shutting off the air supply from above. My pick alone isn't enough to hold it out. I will do it.

No sooner said than it's done. Okay, I am almost ready to try going feetfirst and the rope wrapped just once, loosely around my right wrist. There.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter nine

I want a drink. I am dry from diggin'. Or, then again, I don't want to drink a lot and have my kidneys kick in while I'm in the pipe. I'll need to check the damn snake, too. I can still see him curled up above.

I've got to get through this pipe. I've come too far to quit, now. Famous last words. Before I start, I must answer one question. Can I stand to be in this pipe for around 45 minutes, or even an hour at a time? Not really? Then, don't start, 'cause you may - - - very well have to face up to that possibility. Yes, I could be in there that long, or even longer if - - - I can't get all the way through and have to come back.

Voice of gloom. Don't give in to such reasoning. All will be just fine. I am only going just as far as I want to. I can always come back. Just relax and do remember this hook. And, it's only 20 feet. Uh, it's time to get started.

Something like this could give me bad dreams. It might stay with someone permanently. Get the rope and rig the hook. No one else is going to do this for me. This is it. Feetfirst! Put the left arm down and the right one up front on the rope. I must keep this rope taught, to keep this piece of strap iron and grappling hook from falling, or the hook may come loose and pull right through the pipe. Remember, keep it taught, and I will have a way back, with the hook.

I'm halfway in now. This is really no problem at all, except I can't see where I'm going. I can't tell what it looks like in the lighted chamber ahead. And, now I'm all the way in. I'm committed. It's a little tight, even with everything out of my pants pockets.

This feetfirst approach will only tell me if this pipe is wide enough, for me not to get stuck. My head is about four feet inside the pipe. I'd guess my feet must be to almost the halfway point. Uh, oh. I can't go any further. I'm stuck. I seem to be hung up.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter nine

Maybe, it's a small rock. Relax, now. So, start to pull on the rope to the hook - - - - . Nothing! I am not getting unstuck. I keep trying to lift my left arm. I keep forgetting. I can't. It's not available to help pull. I need to rethink this part of my whole procedure. And, I'm havin' a little, just a "little," tightness in my chest - - - - . I can't seem to catch my breath. Take little half breaths. That's it!

Now, keeping this rope taught and working just my right hand fingers, pull rather hard, - - - - at once. Wait, wait - - - - deep breath, exhale - - - - short breath, ready - - - - . Pull! Pull! Pull!

There, - - - - I moved! I can make it. I know I can, now. Relax. Rest just a few moments. Now, take a deep breath, exhale - - - - wait. Get ready - - - - puuuuuulll! O.K., I've got it.

I can wiggle again. I even found room to move my left hand to help pull on the rope from below my hips, as well as with my right hand. This is great! Now, I am movin'. I can reach the hook, now, the strap iron. It's larger, here - - - - and - - - - I'm out, at last.

I wasn't in there more than eight minutes, but it seemed like it - - - - might be for ever.

The problem, now, is that for all that trouble, I still haven't gotten a good view of the entire chamber on the other end, 'cause that part of it is all out of my line of sight, off to the right. That is where the source of the light seems to be. But, I can't - - - - tell for sure. Which means, that I need to go - - - - "headfirst." I mean, there just isn't any other way.

If I had a couple pieces of mirror - - - - but, I don't. So, just forget it. Besides, I have got to go all the way anyway. I must determine about the light. Well, it's going to come to this. I either go or I am just going to quit, now. I guess - - - - I'll quit.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter nine

Noooooo! I can always quit, just not yet. Can't quit, now. It just isn't all that easy. I do want to see - - - into that other room. Is the light there? I really must see. If I just knew that the light "is" in that room, then I'd dig another tunnel if I had to.

I've got to do it today, while there's still good light. I want to go in just far enough to see - - - if the light "is" there.

Looking in my pack - - - there, I found it. My small mirror, about four inches square. It was inside the lid to my windup travel clock. There, I've got it out. Now, to get ready to go headfirst. Oh, brother.

I'll probably have to go most all the way to that other end, in order to see, off to the right side. My hand would have to be within a foot or foot and a half of that end anyway, to see very much. If I have to go that far, I might as well plan to go all the way.

I'm going to rest a few minutes. I need to get a grip on reality. I want to get my mind ready for this experience. No panic. I'll relax. And, just take it easy. This time, "be cool" and watch out for whatever I got caught up on this last time. It might have been a sharp rock. If it is a small rock, just dig it out. It could have just as well have been an evil finger of the Devil, holding me in there. Oh, no, he is sitting up in the Capitol, guiding tax legislation, "designed" to help the working family, no less. I know all about the Devil's work, and it is not here, for I am alone.

I must be strong. Where there's a will - - - .

I've got to get in far enough to see that room, a good line of sight off to the right. The mirror would be better off in my left hand, for that need. I can't manage that. I will want my right arm in front of me, to allow greater strength to work my way through. Uh! Don't even like thinking about this.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter nine

First, I'm going to throw this ball of twine into the pipe and all the way out the other end. Now, I'll very securely tie this end to my backpack and keep the twine between my feet as I head into the pipe, pulling it into the pipe a short ways and pulling the hook and piece of strap iron in, next, pushing the rope ahead.

Here goes. Head in first. Backpack is in place. My left arm is down by my side - - - . It will still be my secondary pulling source, while my right will be my primary. Wiggling in, now. No turning back. Time is of the essence, now. I don't want to be going into a dark room on the other end. Forget it.

Still wiggling in, farther, farther - - - until now. I can pull the hook up in place. There, I'm in. Whew, it's snug, very snug, even at the start.

I'm going to wait a few seconds right here before I go any further. I want to see if there's any air to be - - - available to me from the other chamber with the light. There should be, from its light shaft. Am not choking, yet. There does seem to be good air, but there certainly isn't any draft to speak of. It's hot in here, well warm, anyway. It's so close in here. I can't - - - whooh. Don't ever think about that. Do yourself a favor, Steve, and stay away from that. I'm back on track. Relax, cool off. Settle down. I can, if I want, just go right back out, from here. In this position, lying on my right side and on my back, I can breathe better than if I were on my stomach. But, the wiggling part is more difficult this way.

About 98% of the air from behind me is cut off by my own bulk. There seems to be plenty of air in here, now, but it's a little stale. Good. Something in the plus column for a change.

It's time to move forward. I put my small mirror and a nail punch in my left shirt pocket. I'll get it out later, when I actually need it.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter nine

Pushing this rope along in front of me, is a real pain. It's not easy to manage. Should have rolled it in a ball. I've come to the point where I was stuck a little earlier. I don't see it, here. However, going in feetfirst, I was unable to see anything ahead of me in the pipe. This way, I'll be able to see everything as I encounter it. The light is better, now. That is very important right now.

But, I don't want to forget - - - - not to go too far, here in the beginning. I want to stop and assure myself that I can go back, at this point, still.

My head is about 9 feet into the pipe. I can see almost 12 or 13 feet ahead of me. The light is better and now it's time to make sure I can still go back.

Right in front of me, is a place where it gets to be a little smaller. It does seem to close in, on all - - - - . Whooley! Don't do that. For a moment, this pipe looked like it got another 20 feet longer. I had better get the mirror out while I can still reach it.

Relax. Now, get the rope in both my right and my left hands. Pull up any slack. There. Good.

I'm in control. Pulling the rope towards me with my left hand and pushing away from me with my right, I should begin to slide back - - - - . Breathe, exhale. Pull! Good, it works. I only moved 3 or 4 inches for that one pull, but that's plenty. That's as much as I could have expected to achieve, in only one pull.

One of the mental disciplines of this little trip through this pipe, is that of not yielding to a sudden impulse to sit up and take a deep breath of air. Just relax and be perfectly satisfied to lay here and rest.

Can't just sit up and walk out of here. It takes just as long, if not longer, to wiggle back out, as it took to get in. So, relax! Push the rope and mirror.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter nine

It takes time, minutes per foot. Must not get to thinking "hot." I can't get anxious or panic. I must relax at all times. Accept the confinement and adjust to the time restraints, mentally. Relax the mind in a limbo state. Don't go to sleep though. That would be disastrous! Just accept the slow progress, maintain a low profile of physical expectations. Be alert to any cramping muscles. Avoid any distasteful thoughts.

Screen my impulses. Can't make any sudden moves. Think about what you're doing. Moving along at a very slow pace. Saving my energy as I go. Moving forward, it feels like I'm caught on a sharp rock again. Here, I must be about 10 feet in, at my head, now. It still looks like an awful long ways to go. Did I misjudge a short distance like 20 feet? That's possible. Given, there's no specific object to focus on visually, right near the other end. It's possible the distance looked "compressed," or shorter than it actually is. Push up the rope and the mirror, now.

So, I'm not even halfway, yet. Still moving, I'm about 11 feet in, at my head, plus two more feet to my finger tips, where I'll - - - . Where's the mirror? Ah, here it is, by my shoulder. I forgot to just keep pushing it along. I'd sure hate going back for it.

I must not forget my mirror again. It'll be like a 2-foot extension to my eyes, to see around the other end of the pipe.

I've come about 12 feet, now, and it seems like a 12-foot distance still remains to the other end.

It is just not getting any closer. I know I have come another foot, because I've been marking the feet, ahead of me, as I go, using my forearm as a rule. I'm about halfway. So, I'd say this pipe is about 25 feet long, from end to end. The inside out view makes this remaining distance appear to get smaller ahead. Maybe not. The light ahead is good, however.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter nine

This illusion to smallness may be my subconscious nerves reacting to my own extreme restriction - - - . Don't say that! Just say, - - - being idle. Relax! Don't get tense. Stay loose. Breathe easy.

I've come another foot. That's 13, now. I'm now getting the hang of this. And, I'm getting there. It is time to get reassurance that I can pull myself back to the "hook." Never a moment's rest, I Really should have done this before, at the 12-foot mark. Oh, well.

My feet must be about 7 feet in from the starting end. I'd better try to pull myself back, now. Take a deep breath. Exhale. Short breath - - - pull! I'm moving. Try again, just to be sure. Pull! It works.

I don't want to go in too far, not so far, that I can't overcome any "drag resistance" caused by pulling the rope. Breathe in slowly, then exhale. And, pull! I moved again. I'm going to be okay. Now, to make up this ground again. First, rest and relax. Keep cool. Think about the light.

When I get 20 feet or so into the pipe will there be too much drag, to come back? No, because then I'll be able to reach out the other end. Maybe, there will be a limit. No, I don't think that the distance alone will be the problem. Tightness is the key, here. So, if I took up only 75% of the diameter of the pipe, I'd be able to pull myself back from 200 feet. Because, I would only be pulling myself along, one foot at a time toward the source end. It is like crawling. There is no cumulative "drag" effect.

All I'm doing is sliding along a stiff rope. Oh, no rope and - - - don't think like that! Relax. My problem here is closeness, that prevents easy sliding. I'm beginning to feel a little stiff. I need a rest.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter

T E N

Empty Nest?

And now, I'm in about 15 feet, and it's getting a bit tight. Time to - - - yes, time to pull back and see if I still can go back. I've been here 35 minutes or so. Ahh, can't see my watch. It's on my left arm. Too late, now. Don't think about it! Concentrate, on enduring. Relax, relax. Rest a second. Time to pull back. Pull! Nothing. Damn. Wait, you rushed. Just wait, now. Take your time. I'm getting warm in here. Relax. I feel a muscle cramp coming on. Rest, take a deep breath. Exhale. This "will" work. Short breath and relax. Ready, - - - pull! There, I did move.

Once more just to make sure I didn't imagine that I moved. Rest, relax. Concentrate. Deep breath, now and relax. Now, pull! Good. Two or three inches and I'm okay. Time to get back on track.

Now that I look up, immediately ahead, the next 3 or 4 feet appear larger in diameter, by 4 maybe even 5 inches, but in an uneven manner.

There, that is better. That took no time at all, to go 4 more feet. I can breathe easier, now. I must be just about 19 feet in. It's cooled off, too. Just who else, in all the world, would ever do this?

So, moving right on along - - - I might as well go all the way, if I can. I must be five feet further in and only 4 feet from the other end, ahead.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter ten

It's no certainty, but it is a damn sight shorter distance, if only I can get on through these last four feet. They're smaller than here where I am, now, much smaller, maybe even - - - - more so, than the first 12 feet. Never mind. Keep the faith. Keep moving ahead with the mirror out in front. The light is very good.

These last few feet - - - - I don't know, but, it is a long way back. And, if I get all the way - - - - relax, now, - - - - all the way, then I can go back to the boulder end, headfirst. Sounds good. Don't think about that - - - - it may not have to occur. Move the mirror. Can't use it, yet. I'm getting close, but it can't help, yet.

If I'm able to get all the way through this time, I will be able to have my canteen of water and all the equipment in the backpack, just by pulling this twine. It's plenty strong enough. I could sure enjoy a drink right now. I am now within 3 and 1/2 feet of the end.

There is a lot of light ahead, not bright though. I can't, uh, quite see - - - - no, not yet. "Almost." Just another foot! One more foot - - - - and finally, I'll be close enough to see - - - -. I've got to move closer, just a little - - - - closer. It's too tight. I'm stretching out as far as I can and I just can't do it. I'm so close - - - - if I could just squeeze into the next foot, I could see. Uh, oh. I'm caught!

Can't move, much less - - - -. Just relax, now. Getting warm. Don't do this to me, not now. I'm just too close to quit, now. Rest - - - - for a minute, or a few seconds, anyway. Can't get my breath. It's too tight here. I'm just 3 feet from the end, now.

The opening up ahead is slightly larger, for that very last six inches. The good news is that that will allow me to see much better, off to the right, with my mirror. But, the bad news is that I won't have a well defined edge at the opening, to help pull myself out.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter ten

Now, to get loose. Wait a minute. I "am" loose! I am not caught. I can breathe, again. I just tensed up from anticipation of getting all the way out of the opening and caused my overall bulk to swell in size.

I'm okay. Relax, now. Think "small." And, move forward just an inch at a time. Keep extended all the way. Take the weight off the right shoulder.

There, now, I've come another seven inches. It's only about 2 and 1/2 feet to the end, but I can't even extend my arms as far as before, 'cause it is so close in here. I must try, now. I want to see. Get up the mirror, just a little more - - - in the fingers.

Think "one-handed." Maybe, I should have used my left hand up front. Too late for that, now. Besides, I wouldn't want to be on my left side, now. This side is best. I thought it all out, before. This can work just fine. There. The mirror is up. Slowly, turn up the palm. That's it. And, twist it over to my right. Angle it. I can see the wall - - - angle more, more - - - just a little more. There!

I see something. The "light!" Finally! I see a bright shaft of light, coming down from above, just as those in the Great Chamber. I can see something else, at the bottom, near the floor - - -. OOps! Get it!

There went the mirror. I've dropped it. I can't believe I did that. I dropped it, right at the moment when I was about to determine what I saw at the bottom of the light shaft. Well, it's gone, out the opening.

There was - - - ugh! Ooooooh.

Ooh, no. Damn! I wanted to see - - - whatever was in the light shaft. And, now I'm stuck "for real" this time. When I reached out for the mirror, - - - to catch it, I must have stretched myself out into the smaller space ahead, without realizing I was doing it.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter ten

Not to panic, this is just a dream, and I'll wake up any second, now. Any second, wake up! Not a dream at all. Pull on the rope, pull! Nothing. Nothing!

I can't go back! And, I definitely can't go forward, even though there's only two more feet to go. I am really stuck! This isn't happening, really!

Try to relax, now. "Think" your way out of this. You can do it! O.K. Think about the larger, yes, the "larger space," just back of this point. I feel sick.

This is not good. I'm getting warm, really warm. I'm losing it. Stop! Can't lose it, I'm too close.

Relax, now. Don't tense up - - - relax! O.K., I don't know - - - I hope "this isn't it." I know I haven't given it my best try. But, I want to wait for a minute or two. I want to put this off - - - well, wait, anyway. Because, if I can't get it with my very best attempt, then I'm here for good. I want to rest.

Yes, rest and cool off. There, that's better. I will try to move back, - - - just a minute. Lookin' forward to it. Can do it. Reason, that if I got "in" to this point, then I can get "out." Right! I can.

Hardly can get my breath. I'm going back. Right now. Here we go. Take it easy. Easy. Breathe easy. Now, concentrate. Puuuuull! Both hands. Yes! Yes!

Oh, yeeeeeah! I moved - - - 4 inches, at least.

That helped. I really needed that. Now, keep on movin' back. Back. Back. There! I'm back into that larger space, now. Relax, again. I can move around a little and work out some of my stiffness, maybe. Ooh, that was close. I should have been more careful.

That was not good. I got warm, really warm! I'd come awfully close to losing it. Can't do that, now.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter ten

Cool down. Don't tense up - - - - relax!

Breathe deeply, once again. Again. There, rest. I'm safe for now. But, I've got real problems.

I am so glad to get back here. Take another deep breath. Oh, that feels so good.

I guess, there comes a time in each person's life when they may have to face up to the reality that "the end is here," that death is imminent, that there is no way around it. That, the end is near, prematurely.

I'm not to that point - - - - yet. Well, I hope. But, it seems like I could deal with "it" better, if I could just - - - - sit up, stretch out, or move around with a certain - - - - feeling of dignity. This being stuck in here, lying down, in such close quarters, has a feeling of humiliation. I'd rather be sitting up or even standing up when the end comes. Then again, it's the remoteness of this situation that makes it totally unacceptable. No one would ever find me down here, in this remote pipe, especially with that boulder back in place. Thanks to that snake, I'm hidden from sight.

Anyone who has ever been caught up in a collapsed structure as a result of an earthquake or a horrendous storm, knows this feeling. Not a soul to call out to.

Some people have been found alive, even conscious after being trapped for hours, even days. How do they do it? Who knows? Each one of us has to find our own way out, not necessarily with courage - - - - .

Some people turn to prayer, some equivocate their own dire resolution and absolute hopelessness. While, others "never say die." It is easy to deceive oneself of being a coward, a lost soul, in the very beginning, but as time lingers on, I sense that no "distinguished award" is assured for these desperate roles, no matter how convincingly portrayed.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter ten

Whereas, finding any self-esteem or dignity in my very smallest emotion, I feel that I can face it, now, though I could not - - - - never accept it. Mortality is a one-on-one or private proposition. No one "else" can do it for you.

I really hadn't thought much about going, - - - - myself. My time always seemed to still be a long time off. But, I should have been thinking about the heady eventuality of it, much earlier in life. Not now.

That's fine, when a long life leads up to a point where death can even be accepted as a type of blessing or a relief. However, thinking of it as premature, it seems totally unacceptable. I'm just not ready to let go, yet. I'm tired and I ache all over, especially my knees, from yesterday's fall.

Well, it's time for a miracle. I need one "now!" Need to think. Hopefully, I have every possibility of still going back to where I started at the hook. But, I want to - - - - I'm afraid - - - - . I am afraid of getting stuck. The next time - - - - . Never mind.

Just when things look the gloomiest, I somehow do manage to come up with a break. And, while pushing my hand back and forth to brush away the loose dirt which was scraped up in a pile, earlier by my shoulder, as I stretched out my fingers to catch my falling mirror, I see them. I am uncovering, revealing several, - - - - lots of little stones. Must be seeing things. There, little stones! Just like little floor tiles. I could use something to dig with. Something sharp. And, now I remember, suddenly.

I remember that I've got a steel nail set down in my left shirt pocket. I had forgotten all about that. I'd originally thought it might come in handy, digging up small stones along the floor of the pipe that might cause me problems sliding over them. The idea had all been just to remove impertinent little pointed stones.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter ten

I also know how hopeless I felt only moments ago. I couldn't reconcile just how I could give up and yet, it appeared that I wouldn't be able to continue on out the other end of the pipe. How quickly Fate can paint a totally new picture. I think this could be a bright spot in my future. I have to follow through.

Now, as I look ahead at the floor in that spot, I can now see that there are many, many small stones, of golf ball size. If I remove these just ahead, maybe I will have enough extra depth in this part of the pipe, to slide easily out the end ahead. New hope at last.

There is plenty of room here in the pipe to reach down in my shirt pocket - - - there, got it. Now, I will just dig up a couple and see how deep they go. I can get at least 4 inches of them dug out right there. And, they seem to continue all the way to the end. It "is" a miracle! Can this be? This will give the pipe the dimension of a much greater diameter.

I could have taken the "easy way" out of here, by going back to where the hook is. That could have been another 35 minutes in here, but no satisfaction. But, if I can dig up the floor for another foot and a half, I should be out of here - - - in 15 to 20 minutes.

The difference is that I'll be able to go forward to the "light." In fact, if I pull the backpack up to between my knees - - - . No. Yes! Then, I can get a screwdriver out with my left hand, and upright it.

Then, I could reach the screwdriver with my right hand, at my wrist. Bingo! It will make a much better digging tool. The only hazard is that I wouldn't have the option of going back, perhaps, 'cause the backpack could "block" the way. No matter, though.

I'm headed West! Now, to pull the string. There it comes. Slowly, but surely. It's coming. And, I'm surprised how heavy it seems. Use both hands, now.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter ten

I have it, finally. Work it up to where - - - -. I've got it. Now, find the screwdriver. There it is. Got it! Now, turn it around. O.K. Put my right hand down. I wish I could look, but - - - - there, it's up all the way to my shoulder. There, it's out in front. Digging with it. Works great. This isn't going to be such a long time, after all.

This rubber handle will help save what is left of my right hand. These little rocks are coming out like little floor tiles. See if I can - - - - there's one, two, three - - - - nothing to it. And, they do appear to continue right on out to the end. Just a couple of inches more - - - - and I'll be done. There!

Dig them out, one at a time, and shove all of the dirt and rock ahead and out the opening. Hope I don't break the mirror. I don't need any seven years of bad luck, right now - - - - anytime.

I'm able to clear a groove 9 or 10 inches wide by about 4 inches deep. That's plenty. I'm already into it. I'm a foot closer. A little more to go. An easy last foot, my head will be at the opening. There, I'm at the end. Let me pull myself out, first, then I can take a look around. The very last foot's easy because the last six inches slopes downward. There, finished.

Suddenly, everything is looking up. All I've got to do is slide on out of here. No problem. Down onto the loose dirt pile below. My legs are so stiff, I am barely able to pull them out. There. I'm out!

I can breathe again. Whew, dusty! Got to rest a while, catch my breath and decide what this room is to the GOLD FROG Riddle. Oh, I don't want to go back the way I came. No way! Just sit here and study the room and the light shaft. I can see it, clearly. It is 30 feet away, down to the right. Can't be bothered, now.

It feels so good to sit up and stretch out.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter ten

I need to get the kinks out of my legs. The room has a ceiling that seems about 25 feet high, and it is rectangular. There is still plenty of bright light.

The immediate area around where the light hits on the floor is like a golden pool. The source does seem likely to be the same as those in the Great Chamber.

I need a drink real bad. While I was in there, I didn't know if I would "ever" get another drink again. My eyes are just now focusing to the bright light. It has a certain warming effect. How did that Riddle go? "Find the light, where the frog sleeps with all of his wealth." Something like that.

There he is! Bathing in the light shaft. Or, is he sleeping? The Riddle continues - - - "Must catch him with great stealth." That I've done, already. It doesn't really mean to "catch" him, just to "find" him here, where he rests. So, the rest of the Riddle goes on to say: "Raise the flag over his nest," and "Behold the GOLD of his crest." Sounds like pirate jargon. I don't want to lose the scent when I'm so close, now.

Well, there he is. Could that large flat rounded stone that he's sitting on be his "flag?" A flagstone could be the "flag" - - - over his nest. That would imply that there is something under that stone. If it weighs a pound, it probably weighs 100 to 150 pounds.

Before I move on, I want to dig out my mirror, it was my Mother's, her favorite pocket mirror. If I had to choose between taking it or a sack of diamonds back home, I'd take the mirror. Where is it? Somewhere, I should find it - - - down in this loose dirt. There it is. I've got it. Now, it's time to pull the back-pack on through, just a little more. It's stuck where I had dug out those extra 4 inches. There, it's loose now. I've got it, too. Ready to move on.

I want to get closer to that flat stone.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter ten

I want to take a good look all around it. Were I to lift that stone, raise it high, and then saw it was covering up a hole beneath, the light would shine down through it like a spot light, on whatever might reside down below. I need to see this stone more closely. I think it looks normal enough. Go slowly. "Hello, Mr. Frog - - - ." He seems okay. He's not afraid of me at all. That figures!

True. Afterall, we are old friends. Whoooh! He jumped up and darted off the flat rock, flat stone, or "flag" and went down behind it, out of sight. Hmmmmmm?

I'm going closer. Why is he so jumpy? Where did he go? I'm exhausted. I'm going. I'm going. I'm at the light shaft. I don't see the GOLD FROG.

As I begin to walk around to the left side of the flat stone, I see the GOLD FROG once again. He is now sitting at the edge of a small hole, maybe four inches square. It's right at the backside of this stone he's been sleeping on. It must be his escape route. He is gone. One second he was there and the next he's gone.

The frog went right under the flat stone. But, I don't think that I scared him. He had been sitting on his stone, here, the whole time that I was grunting my way through that pipe. No, something else must've had an adverse affect on him and caused him to take a hike in a hurry. Here we go. He's leading the way, again.

And, doing like the Riddle says to, I will try to slide this large stone now. I've got to do this while the light is still strong. A faint light won't help.

I'll need good light, once I've moved this stone. If it will move. My watch says it is 2:15 p.m. So, I have about 2 more hours of sunshine left today. Here, I need another drink of water, then I will see if I am able to move it. I could never lift it "dead weight." But, I might be able to slide it over to one side.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter ten

The stone doesn't budge. Uhhh! I'll stomp on it on all sides and try to break it loose. Now, let's do it again. Shooooove! There, it moved. I did it. It is sliding, now. Slowly, but surely. That's all I am able to do. That'll have to do. I quit. I'm tired.

As I peer down into the hole, the light shaft has given everything below a strong "golden hew." "Behold the GOLD of his crest." This is it. But, I can't see exactly what is down there. I need to go down there.

I must plan ahead a little. Here, I'll take this jacket of mine and empty all the contents of the back- pack into it. Then, I'll tie it up real good. I take a second piece of rope and tie it to the first, coming from within the pipe. Uh, oh. I completely forgot to keep that rope taught. Pull it and - - - it's okay! The hook is still holding. Great, tie these two ropes together. There. I kept the flash out.

Get everything over here by the hole. I'm taking all of it with me. I hope there's another way out. I will throw my gear down, first. There. Now, I'll let myself down into the area below. My feet land in some kind of loose, large gravel-like material. Mushy?

I want to wait a minute, to let my eyes adjust to the brightness down here. I don't want to step on the GOLD FROG by accident. Now, they are coming around to - - - there seem to be darker areas down here. This gravel is weird. It's slushy. Water. There is water in here. That's why I'm having trouble standing still in here. I'll step back out of the main stream of the brightest light. Ah, that helps a lot. Oooooooh! It isn't gravel at all. I can't believe my eyes. Every-thing is sparkling like a thousand stars in a galaxy.

The vault-like room is about 6 feet by 8 feet and a good ten feet deep. What's unbelievable is that the whole floor is nothing but gemstones of every possible color and type imaginable and at least a foot deep.

THE GOLD FOG

Chapter ten

Must be at least the equal of a dozen chests full of jewels, here. Are there other rooms? Or, is there an exit? I hope there is. I don't want to go through that pipe again.

I can see now, just fine. If there's no exit out of here, then I'll need to climb back up the rope. It isn't my first choice. Wait a minute, what's that? I think - - - yes, I see a narrow little dark crevice. It is a very small exit of some kind. I'd barely fit. That is the only one. I wonder if it goes all the way "out?" Where does it end up? Maybe, it's a dead end. I could get through it, sideways. It looks to be most of 20 inches wide. Little more than that pipe, except I'd be standing up and walking sideways. No sweat. I want a compass reading on it. Heading is due North!

It goes off in the direction of the streambed. I want to start packing away some of these larger stones in my backpack. There are thousands of them, both the single stones and many man-made pieces of old jewelry. I see three tiaras full of diamonds and four exquisite emerald necklaces. I'll stick to the single stones.

There'll be less for me to explain, when I decide to sell any of these, if there are only single stones. I'm still filling the pack. There is gold, a ruby big as a plum, emeralds galore and endless diamonds. Many are uncut lumps of luster. The bright light helps.

Question! What is a reasonable number - - - or share of this prize? I have solved the Riddle. It is mine. However, the GOLD FROG will still be here. All of this is still his domain. I will fill the backpack and consider my contract filled, until another day, we are even, for now.

I think he would agree.

Enough is enough. Besides, most of the joy comes in the quest of finding, rather than in the "sacking."

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter ten

Did I say "joy?" I've got to be kidding. I just went through Hell to get this far. And, I'm not quite out of here, yet.

Finishing up, I've got everything packed up. Oh, there must be 50 pounds of gems there. That's enough!

Suddenly, I feel a cold sweat that freezes me all over, as the light above is interrupted by something.

Hey, what's happening to the light? Clouds? No! There's something coming down through the hole from up above. It could be only one thing. The Anaconda! He is back. I guess it's the same one. I should've tied an orange ribbon around his neck, so that I could tell if it was that same one. Too late, now.

How could it be? How did he get here? Ohhhhhhh! The pipe. I'm sure glad I didn't think of him while I was in the pipe. He is coming on down into the vault. Got to get out. The snake is between me and the exit. Can he know about the narrow crevice out?

The GOLD FROG. He's after "him," again. Where's he at, now? There he is, going down that narrow exit. The frog glows golden, in the glare of the flashlight. By now, this giant snake has slithered completely into the vault. It looks like he wants to play. The snake coils and rears his head, forked tongue hanging loose. He opens his mouth wide. "Hello, Mr. Snakey. Want to do lunch? O.K., here, add something rich to your diet today." And right then, I reached down and shoveled a big handful of gems right into his wide open mouth.

I grabbed all my gear, and I broke for the narrow exit. The gems caught him totally by surprise. Those gems were not his cup of tea. He choked and gagged on them. This gave me time to get away, into the crevice and take everything I needed with me. I am completely loaded down, sliding sideways "in a sweat." I must be careful not to step on the GOLD FROG, in my haste.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter ten

I stopped and used my flash to look back, and see if I could spot the snake. He's coming, slowly. Then I checked up ahead, and I could see a scared GOLD FROG hopping along in front of me. I wasn't catching up to him either. He was really movin' out!

I'm about 25 feet into this narrow tunnel and the damn thing curves to the right. I'm sliding sideways. The frog is leading the way, and I'm right behind him. I've come another 20 feet. There's water on the floor of this tunnel, several inches. I want to check on my friend the snake and see - - - flash up, but I can't see him at all. He must have given up, too narrow for such a big snake. He couldn't turn around, probably.

Now, I'll check on the GOLD FROG and - - - he's not there, either. He's gone! Well, I can slow down. The ceiling is coming down, only 5 feet high, with the width getting larger and the floor beginning to slope.

I'm slipping. On my tail, now. Sliding down the chute. Whooh! Got to slow down. There. That's all right, now. It's getting steeper. I'm sliding down a 35 degree slope and it's getting worse. Can't hold on to nothin'. Got my hands full. Turning sideways will help. Oh, my head. Whoooops! I'm falling - - - in the dark, into - - - Ahhhhhh! Wet, all wet. I must have landed in the streambed. It's about 2 feet deep.

I'm okay. Not a soft landing, but a safe one. I still have everything with me. The flash "is" working fine. I seem to be pretty near - - - yes, here's an old familiar site. It's the beginning of tunnel #1.

And look who's waiting for me, Mr. Frog, no less. Time to sit and rest. I guess there's no reason to go back up and replace the boulder, 'cause the damn snake already knows how to move it. No, the only thing that I need to do now, is get my two sacks of supplies from up in the Great Chamber. I'll leave the jacket packed with my gear, here, but the backpack goes with me.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter ten

Would you like a "lift" Mr. Frog? There you go.

Here we are, back at the hatch cover. In you go. I can still squeeze over this thing. I wish this pool was not being left only half full, but I can't fix it. However, the GOLD FROG seems to be perfectly content.

Whooooa! How could this be?

The pool is "full" again! How? How could it be? Uhhhhh, this is great. Yeah. So now, Mr. Frog you're in charge, again.

The GOLD FROG Riddle is solved.

Thanks a million!

THE GOLD FROG

Plate - I

1773 - Colonial Virginia Copper Halfpenny



Obverse



Reverse

This historic Colonial Virginia copper Halfpenny is extremely rare. Very few of these copper specimens ever find their way into the current market place.

W.N.V.

THE GOLD FROG

Chapter

ELEVEN

Riddle Of The Letters

With his gems safely in six safe deposit boxes, a beautiful July 25 finds Steve heading out West, toward Harpers Ferry, WV and investigating another adventure: the Riddle of the 12 copper coins. Taking his two new K-9 companions, Digger and Goldy, a pair of "retiring" attack dogs and his metal detectors, Steve drives into historic Virginia, stopping along the way in the green Shenandoah Valley. His destination is the confluence and the tri-state boundary. Is this the "Key" to this riddle? Only Steve seems to know. Just as tomorrow's another day, where there's a will, there's a way.

Whenever things seem dreary, or I feel down right blue, there's one thing I know that's all too true:

"Gold is the leaf,

Moist is the dew,

Brightest is Good Fortune,

When she smiles on you!"

***** THE END *****

THE GOLD FROG

Author's Notes:

As I mentioned in the Introduction, this story is not merely a simple work of fiction, for there is that single, irrevocable thread of historic and romantic presence of an era gone by, a land with a dream, a people with a destiny, and rigid standards set by men who lived "the old ways."

A folk tale of the 1773 period recounts that it was a "custom" of some of the more superstitious households then to place a "halfpence" copper coin at either side of their home, East and West sides, to ward off any "evil spirits." Consequently, in Alexandria, Virginia several such coppers have been found in cracks in the walls of "old" homes that are undergoing renovation and restoration, near Old Town.

These old Colonial Virginia copper Halfpennies became the "first authorized and legal coinage" of early Colonial America. Antiques? Yes. Rare? Yes. Unusual? Yes!

Perhaps among the rarest of the Virginia Halfpennies, are a few surviving examples of "counterstamped" specimens that were stamped with a "personal" mark, or initials of a local merchant, some think for advertising. Often, just a single letter was struck. One specimen is stamped on both its obverse and its reverse, each by a different author.

The surviving specimens that have managed to endure a lifetime of honest labor and hard times are more than just collectors items, or merely romantic novelties. They have commanded the integrity of our forefathers, the respect of Colonial merchants "throughout the colonies," even decades after the American Revolutionary War with England ended.

Not only within the Commonwealth of Virginia are they important to early American monetary development, but they virtually constitute a unique and rare National Treasure.

W.N.V.

